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From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history

ROBERT C. ALLEN

As recently as 1975, when I taught my first film history class, film history still was almost universally taken to mean the history of films Not all films, of course, just those films a teacher could nominate with a straight face as 'art' in defending his or her course to a colleague in art history or literature. Ironically, the first film 'theory' that French, then British, and finally American scholars took up in opposition to this cinematic New Criticism – the 'auteur theory' – merely bolstered the historiographic notion that film history was to be studied as a succession of texts The corpus of film history – especially American film history – was certainly modified as a result of auteurism, but the idea that film history rested upon the interpretation of a body of texts remained unchallenged Any hopes of dethroning the text in film studies and textual interpretation in film history were dashed in the mid-1970s as auteurism was succeeded by structuralism, semiotics, and Lacthusserianism Film history was to take a very back seat indeed during the reign of high theory, which is not surprising given its resolutely ahistorical and thoroughly conventionalist underpinnings. All the cool graduate students were analyzing texts Anyone interested in questions of history was clearly not with the program, and anyone interested in non-cinetextual historical questions – economic structures, the relationship between cinema and other forms of popular entertainment. technology. the organization of labor, or what might

have gone on the billions of times the texts of film history were 'read' by viewers – was also a damned empiricist!

And yet as I prepared that first set of film history lectures, issues of context not textual interpretation troubled and fascinated me most – a fascination, I must admit, that owed more to intellectual perversity than prescience. Specifically, I was struck by how little the audience or even exhibition featured in the received film history we all learned in film courses or read about in survey accounts. Except for the legendary viewers who dove under their seats at the sight of Lumiere's train coming into the station; the countless immigrants to the U S who, we are told, learned American values in the sawdust-floored nickelodeons of the lower East Side; and those who, to a person it would seem, applauded Al Jolson's 'You ain't seen nothin' yet' in 1927,[1] film history had been written as if films had no audiences or were seen by everyone and in the same way, or as if however they were viewed and by whomever, the history of 'films' was distinct from and privileged over the history of their being taken up by the billions of people who have watched them since 1894.

Furthermore, a good deal of what had been written about film audiences was supported (if at all) by the flimsiest of evidence and yet was couched in terms of unqualified generalization In one of my early lectures I got to the point in American film history when films had been successfully introduced as vaudeville acts (ca 1896) But quickly thereafter (ca 1897), as I had read in all the standard histories, audiences became so disenchanted with the movies that theatre managers began to use them as 'chasers' – acts so unpopular that they drove the audience from the theatre. The words stuck in my throat. I couldn't 'profess' this moment of film history As a result, I was driven back to more contemporaneous sources and to a wider consideration of the contexts within which early films were received I'll not belabor the 'chaser' issue further here, except to say that nearly fifteen years later I'm far from convinced that films universally sank into a trough of audience disdain during this period or that vaudeville managers routinely used movies they knew their audiences did not want to see to clear the house [2]

Over the past fifteen years, a number of scholars in the U.S and elsewhere at least have added exhibition to the agenda of film history, demonstrating, among other things, how important exhibition was as an historical determinant in the development of the film industry in the U S In the process, they have also suggested something of our appalling ignorance of the most basic facts of exhibition history: differences in exhibition practices among cities and towns, the likely audiences for the tens of thousands of exhibition venues across the U S and over time, and the complexities of the relationship between movie-going and other social practices Today I would hope that no film scholar would write a serious film history with the near total elision of the audience

1 Indeed in their rush to celebrate sound technology, historians of American cinema have ignored the fact that there was serious audience resistance to the introduction of the talkies in the late 1920s in some parts of the U S As late as January 1929, for example a survey of moviegoers in Syracuse New York found that only 50% preferred talkies to silents and only 7% favored elimination of silent films See Henry Jenkins III, Shall we make It for New York or for distribution Eddie Cantor, Whoopie and regional resistance to the talkies' Cinema Journal 29 (Spring 1988) pp 32–52

2 I laid out my arguments against the chaser theory in Contra the chaser theory Wide Angle 3 (1979), pp 4–11 See also my exchange with Charles Musser on the subject in Studies in Visual Communication 10 (1984) pp 24–52

that characterized such works fifteen years ago, and I would similarly hope (although I know in fact they are) that film history classes would not be taught without some minimal attention being given to the conditions under which viewers actually saw films

In 1983 Philip Corrigan declared the history of film audiences to be 'still almost completely undeveloped, even unconsidered'. He argued that the problem of the audience in film history could usefully be recast within the rubric of cultural studies [3] What I would like to propose here is taking Corrigan's reconsideration of the audience in film history a step further namely the enlarging of the notion of exhibition and the audience to encompass a more general historical concern with reception – a move implied in the work of a growing number of film scholars. I am using the term reception here to mean the most inclusive category of issues surrounding the confrontation between the semiotic and the social. Reception thus conceived would have at least four overlapping but theoretically and methodologically distinct components

3 Philip Corrigan Film entertainment as ideology and pleasure a preliminary approach to a history of audiences in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds) British Cinema History, (London British Film Institute 1983) pp 24–35

1 Exhibition

Exhibition here designates the institutional and economic dimensions of reception – that is, the nature of the institutional apparatus under whose auspices and for whose benefit films are shown; the relationship between exhibition as that term has been used within the industry and other segments of the film business; and the location and physical nature of the sites of exhibition

Although no study has systematically charted the nature and historical development of exhibition in the U S , a number of individual studies have suggested something of the previously unacknowledged variety of exhibition practices, particularly during the first two decades of the commercial exploitation of the movies. The first thing these studies are discovering is that New York City – the place from which many of our generalizations about movie-going across the country are taken – is probably *sui generis* with respect to exhibition As soon as we look at cities in other parts of the country, smaller cities without large immigrant populations, and small towns and villages, a very different exhibition picture emerges

For example, concentration on early moviegoing as an urban phenomenon has obscured the fact that during the first decade of the movies' commercial growth, 71% of the population of the United States lived in rural areas or small towns The first audiences for the movies in these areas were not to be found in vaudeville theatres (the towns were too small to support them) or storefront movie theatres (which, if they came at all, came later), but in tents, amusement parks, the local opera house. YMCA hall, public library basement – wherever an itinerant showman could set up his (/her? –

4 On itinerant film exhibition in the U S see Edward Lowry Edwin J Hadley Traveling film exhibitor Journal of the University Film Association 28 (1976) pp 5–12 Burnes St Patrick Hollyman The first Picture Shows Austin Texas (1894–1913)', Journal of the University Film Association 29 (1977) pp 9–22 David O Thomas From page to screen in smalltown America early motion picture exhibition in Winona, Minnesota Journal of the University Film Association 33 (1981) pp 3–14 Calvin Pryluck The itinerant movie show and the development of the film industry' Journal of the University Film Association 35 (1983) pp 11–22 Mark E Swartz Motion pictures on the move , Journal of American Culture 9 (1986) pp 1–8

5 I discuss early exhibition in Durham North Carolina in Film History Theory and Practice (New York Alfred A Knopf 1985) pp 202–07 On the role of amusement parks in early exhibition, see Lauren Rabinowitz 'Temptations of pleasure cinema sexuality, and the turn-of-the century amusement park Camera Obscura forthcoming, Greg Waller 'Situating motion pictures in the pre-Nickelodeon period Lexington, Kentucky 1897–1906 paper presented at the 1989 Conference of the Society for Cinema Studies, and Charlotte Herzog, The archaeology of cinema architecture The origins of the movie theater Quarterly Review of Film Studies 9, (1984) pp 11–32

6 Some interesting work is being done on 'amateur filmmaking practices particularly that by Patricia R Zimmerman See for example Hollywood home movies and common sense amateur film as aesthetic dissemination and social control 1950–62 Cinema Journal 27 (1988), pp 23–44 and Trading down amateur film technology in fifties America' Screen Vol 29 no 2 (1988) pp 40–51

were there any female itinerant exhibitors?) projector Edward Lowry has suggested that one consequence of small communities' reliance upon itinerant showmen was that their audiences attached much more importance to the exhibitor – who, after all, was the present, human agent of their filmgoing pleasure – than to the producers of the films he showed.

For years, travelling exhibitors provided the only opportunities for moviegoing to millions of Americans The dispatching of Lumiere 'operators' around the world in 1896 has left the impression that exposure to motion pictures, at least in the West, was universal and simultaneous However, the more we learn about U S exhibition patterns, the more aware we become of just how long it took the movies to reach some parts of the country Although we know that films were shown in some remote locations (Klondike mining camps in 1898 for example), one itinerant showman claimed to have given the first movie exhibition in Arizona during the 1911–12 season Furthermore, although many travelling exhibitors ceased operation with the spread of permanent exhibition in the 1910s, there were still itinerant showmen on the road as late as 1947. One showman, who worked the small towns of North and South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia, recalled that one of his best customers was a woman who had never seen the movies until he set up his tent in her village for the first time in the mid-1930s.[4]

For some time now my graduate students and I have been charting exhibition patterns in cities and towns throughout North Carolina between 1896 and 1915 Without exception, the exhibition situation contrasts sharply with that in New York Permanent exhibition for example was not established even in the largest North Carolina city until 1906 The first permanent theatres were not located in working-class ghettos but invariably in the centre of the downtown business district Most of these theatres attempted to attract a middle-class clientele from the outset. In some cases itinerant showmen were the first to bring movies to the community, but more often than not in the case of large towns, the first sustained exhibition programs took place in amusement parks, which were constructed at the end of street car lines to encourage ridership My favorite example is the mountain community of Asheville, N C where, in the summer of 1902, movies were projected on a screen erected on an island in the middle of a lake. Many Ashevillians saw their first movie from the stern of a canoe.[5]

The history of non-commercial exhibition has hardly even been considered and has certainly not been written about, despite the fact that film projectors have been marketed for home use since the 1890s, and in 1948 – well before the popularity of Super-8 and half-inch video – more than one million American households owned movie cameras [6] We have also yet to explore the history of the use

of movies in schools – another important non-commercial site of filmic reception

2 Audience

Obviously, at the most basic level this term designates the 'who' of reception. The direct study of contemporary audiences is already fraught with enormous theoretical and methodological problems, which are, of course, multiplied greatly when questions of audience are cast in the past tense. Although some contemporaneous and 'independently' collected data on American movie audiences is available to scholars (the Gallup Poll surveys of audience movie preferences in the 1940s, for example), we know much less in gross demographic terms about the audiences for movies than we do about the historical audiences for broadcasting In large measure this is because, as Motion Picture Association of America President Eric Johnson noted in 1946, the Hollywood film industry knew less about itself than any other American industry As an industry executive characterized market research in Hollywood a few years later, 'We stand in the dark and throw a rock and [if] we hear a crash, [we assume] we've hit the greenhouse'.[7] But leaving the practicalities of historical audience research aside for a moment, the study of historical audiences for the movies should include, for starters, an attempt to determine the size and constitution of the audiences for various films, and the relationship of movie-going patterns to race, gender, class, ethnicity, and other variables

To give another American example from the early period: although immigrants in New York City did go to nickelodeons between 1906 and 1912, not all immigrant groups were equally attracted to the movies Jewish immigrants frequently went to the movie theatres that sprang up on the Lower East Side after 1905, but relatively fewer Italian immigrants, who lived in large numbers in an adjacent neighbourhood, went Why? The best answer I can come up with is that Jews came to the U S to stay and they came as families. Eighty-five percent of Italian migration to the U S between 1885 and 1915 was single men between the ages of 18 and 35 who came to New York to dig the subways or build the Brooklyn Bridge Then the vast majority returned home to Italy For many in this group the movies were an irrelevant extravagance

We have just begun to uncover the history of black exhibition in the U S. In the South blacks were barred from 'white' theatres until the 1960s or were forced to sit in restricted areas of the auditorium By 1915 however, the black ghettoes of a number of southern cities featured black theatres which served as important cultural centres for the community and provided an outlet for black films.[8]

Within the category of audience, I'm also talking about the social

9 Janice Radway *Reading the Romance Women Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press 1985)

meanings attached to movie-going, in the same way that Janice Radway talks about the social meanings of reading romantic novels [9] Obviously, the social meaning ascribed to the viewing of a European art film at Lincoln Center or the NFT is different from being part of the audience for *Debbie Does Dallas* a few blocks away on Times Square or in Soho

As Ien Ang's *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (Routledge, forthcoming) makes abundantly clear with respect to the television audience, 'audience' is as much a discursive as a social phenomenon Individuals are not only solicited but constructed as audience members through industry attempts at marketing research, advertising, promotions, the decor of movie theatres, etc The discourse constructs some audience groups more precisely and differently than others Diane Waldman, for example, has argued that women film-goers have been 'pursued' through advertising, publicity stunts, and other promotional devices 'to a degree disproportionate with their actual representation in the filmgoing audience ' Other groups – blacks and other identifiably non-WASP ethnic groups, for example – have for the most part been omitted from Hollywood's construction of 'the audience' for the movies Mary Beth Haralovich's extensive work on Hollywood advertising has examined both the industry's self-representational strategies as well as those for interpellating viewers.[10] We need to ask whom the industry and their agents have thought they were talking about when they talked about 'the audience'. What presumptions lie behind not only advertising and promotion, but also studio pronouncements and internal discourse regarding 'popularity'. 'box office' and films that 'work' with particular audiences?

10 Diane Waldman From midnight shows to marriage vows women, exploitation and exhibition *Wide Angle* 6 pp 40–49 Mary Beth Haralovich, Mandates of good taste the self-regulation of film advertising in the theatres , *Wide Angle* 6 pp 50–57 'Film history and social history reproducing social relationships *Wide Angle* 8, pp 4–14, and Advertising heterosexuality *Screen* vol 23 no 2 (1982) pp 50–60

3 Performance

By this I mean the immediate social, sensory, performative context of reception. We tend to talk of films being 'screened' as if the only thing going on in a movie theatre were light being bounced off a reflective surface. Obviously, at a number of levels there is much more going on during a film viewing situation than that. Again, we have only begun to chart the enormous variety of cinema performance and changes over time. A look at what I'm calling performance serves to remind us that film has been merely one component of reception Given the rather phenomenologically impoverished nature of commercial film viewing in the U.S and the U K. these days, it is easy to overlook the fact that in the 1920s in America, for example, many viewers were not particularly interested in what feature film was playing They were attracted to the theatre by the theatre itself, with its sometimes bizarre architectural and design allusions to exotic cultures, its capacious public spaces, its air

conditioning in the summer, and its auditorium, which may have been decorated to resemble the exterior of a Moorish palace at night – complete with heavenly dome and twinkling stars. Regardless of what feature the theatre chain had secured from the distributor that week, there was sure to be a newsreel, a comedy short, a programme of music by pit orchestra or on the mighty Wurlitzer, and, in many theatres elaborate stage shows Trade papers from the 1920s (*Moving Picture World* in particular) provided smaller exhibitors with suggestions for lobby displays, promotional tie-ins, publicity stunts, as well as stage shows to complement particular films or genres of films

In a fascinating paper, Mary Carbine has pointed out the role of black movie theatres on the South side of Chicago as providing a venue for jazz and blues [11] Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Erskine Tate, Earl Hines and other legendary black musicians provided musical accompaniment for mainstream Hollywood films Ads in black newspapers featured the pit orchestra much more prominently than the film At times, the jazz bands provided not so much accompaniment to the film as counterpoint. A critic complained that 'Race orchestras discolor the atmosphere that should prevail in the picture house by not characterizing the photoplay. [.] During a death scene flashed on the screen, you are likely to hear the orchestra jazzing away on "Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie"'.

11 Mary Carbine 'The finest outside the loop motion picture exhibition in Chicago s black metropolis , Camera Obscura forthcoming

4 Activation

I'm borrowing this term from reception theory in literature to denote how particular audience groups made or do not make sense, relevance, and pleasure out of particular moments of reception Again, this is obviously difficult to determine with regard to contemporary reception and even more so with regard to reception in the past – as Janet Staiger has pointed out [12]

It is important to note that I'm not talking here of individual activations of filmic texts. In the first place, except for critical discourse we have little evidence of this, and even if we did they would have little relevance except where they represented a more generalizable appropriation of the text Rather we are trying to locate what realists would call the 'generative mechanisms' that operate variably and with uneven force in producing the myriad readings of individual texts among viewers and over time.[13] Thus, charting the location of theatres in cities, hamlets, and villages, or unearthing box office records for a particular film, or reconstructing the critical discourse surrounding a given filmic text has relevance for the history of filmic reception not in itself but only in relation to what these data might suggest about the underlying structures of reception, their interaction, variability, modification over time or

12 Janet Staiger The handmaiden of villainy methods and problems in studying the historical reception of a film Wide Angle 8 pp 19-27

13 On the relationship between realism (as a position within the philosophy of science) and film study see Terry Lovell Pictures of Reality (London BFI, 1980)

resistance to change. I would argue that without the realist notion of generative mechanisms or underlying structures, the historical study of filmic reception becomes either an empiricist fool's errand (in which the scholar is guided by a misplaced faith that by collecting all the available data, he/she can arrive at the truth of the history of film viewing) or merely a game.

It is here that work on film viewing (both historical and contemporary) touches upon and may benefit from reader-oriented theoretical and critical work being undertaken in literature, cultural studies and media studies. Clearly, for example, what viewers have 'made' of films has involved the mobilization of a number of sets of abilities and competences, ranging from the perceptual to the cognitive, and from the affective to the cultural. Some levels, obviously, would seem to yield to historical investigation more easily than others. Although it is difficult and the knowledge yielded enormously speculative, we can attempt to contextualize historical activations of filmic texts by taking a stab (and that's all it is) at the cultural repertoires audiences might have brought with them to the theatre Or, to use Bennett and Woollacott's terminology, we might attempt to examine a given film's *inter-textuality*: 'the social organisation of the relations between texts within specific conditions of reading '[14]

14 Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott *Bond and Beyond the Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London Macmillan 1987) p 45 Michael Budd provides a useful model for analyzing the critical discourse produced in response to a given film See *'The cabinet of Dr Caligari* conditions of reception CineTracts 12 (1981), pp 41–49

To give but one example of a vexing historical problem requiring both textual and inter-textual analysis, let me raise the small matter of the relationship between patterns of style and narration in early cinema and how audiences made sense and pleasure out of their engagements with these texts. Any number of early narrative films (1900–05) cannot be 'read' smoothly by contemporary viewers according to the conventions of classical narrative They contain repeated action, 'unexplained' ellipses, or other features that to us mark them as primitive or their surviving prints as possible victims of some sort of mutilation Are there inter-titles missing from existing prints? Were screenings of these films accompanied by an interlocutor, who provided the missing narrational links? Were audiences in 1900 similarly perplexed by these story-telling strategies? A closer look at the inter-textual contexts of the reception of these films is helping to account for their textual structures In his analysis of *Life of an American Fireman*, Charles Musser suggests that its repeated narrative action draws upon what would have been well-known and understood conventions of magic lantern shows [15] Patrick Loughney, an archivist at the Library of Congress, has discovered that many early filmic narratives reference popular stage productions mounted just before or at the same time as the film's release Thus some of the 'missing' narrative information in some early narratives might have been supplied by the audience, in the form of their knowledge of the theatrical text which was being referenced by the film

15 Charles Musser The early cinema of Edwin S Porter Cinema Journal 19 (1979) pp 1–35

Let me end by at least mentioning two additional reasons the historical study of reception might be of more than antiquarian interest. The first is pedagogic. In my film history classes I sometimes have students conduct a study of exhibition in their hometowns. They use old newspapers, city directories, fire insurance maps, municipal ordinances, interviews with their grandparents, and surviving architecture to uncover something about their community that they didn't know. This kind of assignment can have several effects. First, it helps to break down what students all too frequently perceive as the barrier that exists between producers of knowledge (someone else) and themselves. A student can be wonderfully empowered by becoming the world's leading expert on the history of film exhibition in Shelby, N C Second, students learn something about the way history gets conducted and written. the process of question-framing, collection of evidence, the exercise of historical judgment, etc. Third, they frequently learn what has been written **out** of the history of their community and region. Invariably, black audiences and theatres have left the faintest historical traces, and yet when students talk with people who attended these theatres in the 1920s and 1930s, they find how important these theatres were to the cultural life of the black community And fourth, I can honestly tell my students that the work they are doing is not a mere exercise – each study helps us better to understand the complexities and variety of filmic reception

Although I have concentrated in this article on the history of filmic reception in the United States – where my own work has been located – the historical study of reception may help to open up film history for parts of the world we have too often seen as having no film history When Roy Armes was writing *Third World Filmmaking and the West*, he told me he was struck by the fact that for the most part film history of the third world has meant film production history It is as if, he said, film history erupts in Bolivia or Chile or Senegal only when there is a notable (usually notable in terms of western notions of aesthetic worth) director or film movement in evidence in that country The rest of the time, these countries are written about as if film is not a part of their cultures. But, of course, in many cases indigenous film movements are historical anomolies in the course of a larger history of filmic reception, as millions and millions of people continue to watch films – films made on the other side of the world for very different audiences One of the challenges for film history is to write back in this enormous and enormously important history

In short, what I'm calling for is the study of the historical conditions of filmic reception, a study which may lead us to a better understanding of the mechanisms of reception – how these mechanisms are formed, sustained, change, and vary In effect, we need to ask what generalizable forces help to account for the

unstudiable and for any individual investigator, incomprehensibly numerous and diverse instances of reception that have occurred since 1895 and continue as you read this?

Landscapes and stories in 1960s British realism

TERRY LOVELL

'   . lives lived out on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretive devices of the culture don't quite work.'

Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* [1]

In *Landscape for a Good Woman* Carolyn Steedman tells two stories· of her working-class mother's life and death, and of her own little girlhood in the nineteen-fifties. Her book has become a landmark in feminist biographical and autobiographical writing, and a major point of reference in theorizings of culture and childhood Once written, such stories may, if their time is right, become publicly available for others who may begin to read their own lives and experiences within or against its terms. But this does not always happen They may simply be mapped onto available interpretations regardless of fit. The storyteller may attempt to fix preferred readings through the manipulation of the interpretive devices of the genre, pushing the reader towards certain ways of reading the tale But twentieth-century theories of language have taught us to recognize the capacity of writing to escape the interpretive control of even that most authoritative storyteller, the autobiographer When such stories are adapted for another medium, they may be doubly transformed.

In this article I want to look at the fictional story told by Shelagh Delaney in her play, *A Taste of Honey*,[2] as it was transposed into film The play was produced by Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Royal, Stratford in 1958, one year after the publication of Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* [3] Littlewood's work was based on improvization and collaborative work with the playwright, and the

written text of *A Taste of Honey* is a transcript of the Theatre Royal production It was associated with the 'angry young men' plays of 1950s theatre, and the play was adapted for the cinema by Tony Richardson in 1960, along with a number of other plays and novels with working-class settings The intellectual moment in which Delaney's play and Richardson's film was caught up, was epitomized by Richard Hoggart's book, which came to define the moment. It will be necessary, first, to take a look at this context and at the 'structure of feeling' which Hoggart's work shared with many of these novels and plays, and at the ways in which that structure of feeling was articulated in the film adaptations of the British New Wave, and in the early episodes of *Coronation Street* (Granada 1960–)

The moment of *The Uses of Literacy*

Hoggart drew on his own remembered past to sketch a 'landscape with figures': the traditional Northern working-class community, and to tell the story of its transformation under the impact of affluence and mass culture *The Uses of Literacy* was an enormously influential text It has never been out of print The 1950s had seen a number of sociological ethnographies of the traditional working-class community.[4] But it was Hoggart's book, along with the work of the man whose name was closely linked with his at that time, Raymond Williams, which inspired many young men and women, especially politically engaged adult returners, to embark on the study of sociology in the early 1960s Asked why they had chosen sociology, such students were more likely to cite the influence of *The Uses of Literacy* or *Culture and Society* than any professional sociological text

Hoggart's book coincided with the cultural and political flowering of the New Left in the late 1950s Hoggart's and Williams's writings were founding texts for the New Left, and for the discipline of Cultural Studies which emerged at this period, to gain a footing in higher education with the founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1964 under the directorship of Richard Hoggart

The 1950s had seen a cycle of plays and novels which took working-class subjects – the plays of the 'Angry Young Men', and the novels of men such as Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow and David Storey These works provided the sources for the film adaptations of the British New Wave.

The 'structure of feeling' common to many of these works has been defined by Alan Lovell as '[.] a sympathetic interest in working class communities, [combined with] unease about the quality of leisure in urban society' [5] The analysis of industrial

4 See for example N Dennis, F Henriques and C Slaughter *Coal is our Life* (London Tavistock, 1956) and M Young and P Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London RKP 1957)

5 Alan Lovell Free cinema in A Lovell and J Hillier *Studies in Documentary* (London Secker & Warburg 1972) p 52

capitalism on which this 'structure of feeling' drew had its roots in developments which had already attracted comment in the 1930s A number of writers had observed the emergence of newer forms of working-class life, centred not in the older industrial communities of North and West, and on those heavy industries which were most badly affected by the depression, such as coal, iron and steel, and shipbuilding, but in the Midlands and the South, clustered around newer light industries whose workers were protected from the ravages of unemployment J. B Priestley identified this new England which he discovered on his English journey of 1934

> '. . . the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling-stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools, and everything given away for cigarette coupons' [6]

6 J B Priestley *English Journey* (first published 1934 Harmondsworth Penguin 1987) p 375

Where the older working class had been defined in terms of production and work relations, the terms of Priestley's observations of the new were typical in their focus on leisure and consumption

In the 'thirties, the theme of the new Americanized consumer culture had taken second place to the problem of mass poverty and unemployment In the 'fifties there was a widespread consensus that such primary poverty was a thing of the past, and concern among left intellectuals shifted to the effects which working class 'affluence' and an Americanized mass culture might have on traditional working-class communities and politics Traditional working-class culture, as characterized by writers such as Hoggart, was forged out of material hardship in communities where the individual's most valuable resources were collective family, community, and a shared culture of resistance and mutual support Affluence was viewed ambivalently by the writers of the New Left It was dismissed as a myth, yet viewed with apprehension [7] As families were moved out of the inner cities slums into new housing estates which isolated them, the ties of community were, it was feared, being broken Modern mass-produced (and shoddy) goods were offering new aspirations, new temptations. Hoggart's book crystallized these fears about the corrosion from within of working class culture:

7 John Westergaard The withering away of class a contemporary myth in P Anderson and R Blackburn (eds) *Towards Socialism* (London Collins 1966)

> 'In what ways may "tolerance" help the activities of the newer entertainers? By what means may scepticism and nonconformity be made tarnished ghosts of themselves? Can the idea of "'avin a good time while y'can" because life is hard open the way to a soft mass-hedonism? Can the sense of the group be turned into an arrogant and slick conformity? Can a greater consciousness of these traditional values be developed into a destroying self-flattery?' (p 136)

The spate of writings set in the traditional Northern working-class community was a nostalgic affirmation of the values and strengths of a way of life whose imminent passing it lamented

The shift of focus from work to leisure in delineations of the old and the new working class was certain to have gender-implications, since the relationship of men and women to work and leisure, production and consumption, is a differentiated one These implications have come more sharply into focus with the hindsight gained from twenty years of contemporary feminism. Today it is possible to 'look back in gender'.[8]

8 The title of a book by Michelene Wandor on postwar British drama, *Look Back in Gender* (London Methuen 1987)

Looking back in gender

Because work was seen as the defining feature of working-*men*'s lives, characterization of the traditional working-class community and its culture were masculine, work-related ones, even where the spotlight might happen to fall on the community at leisure Humphrey Jennings's documentary *Spare Time* (1939), a powerful influence on filmmakers of the New Wave, captured this ordering of leisure by work in its movement of imagery from high angle longshots of the industrial landscape, with massive, ugly, smoke-belching plants, down into closer focus on the streets and houses huddled in their shadow, the setting of 'spare time'.

Where the community in question was dominated by a single heavy industry there might be little paid employment available for women, and this helped to naturalize the adult women as wife and mother, rather than as worker In spite of the way in which men's work ordered the terms within which such communities were identified, where the focus was on *community*, women figured prominently within the frame Hoggart's community was the one experienced in childhood, and remembered with affection and in spite of his best efforts, nostalgia, by the adult whose education had taken him away, literally and culturally The memory of the working-class community as experienced by the boy who was marked from 11 plus onwards for a different future, placed at its remembered centre not work. but that which would have had most salience in his own childhood experience. family and neighborhood life

The female heroine of *The Uses of Literacy* is the middle-aged, shapeless, and a-sexual figure known as 'Our Mam' Hoggart, and later, Jeremy Seabrook, celebrated her from the perspective of the adult son In these evocations of the working-class mother, the adult daughter is silent When she speaks, argues Carolyn Steedman. our view of that landscape shifts, the figures in it change:

'The fixed townscapes of Northampton and Leeds that Hoggart

and Seabrook have described show endless streets of houses, where mothers who don't go out to work order the domestic day, where men are masters, and children, when they grow older, express gratitude for the harsh discipline meted out to them' (p 16)

In telling the story of a very different working-class mother, Steedman produces a figure who

'   is not to be found in Richard Hoggart's landscape She ran a working-class household far away from the traditional communities of class, in exile and isolation, and in which a man was not a master, nor even there very much' (p 6)

The point of view of *The Uses of Literacy* is Hoggart's own – the son who became the scholarship boy. It is the position of an insider who has left. The book addresses a non-working class readership It resembles an anthropological study written by an exiled native informant, returning to interpret the culture of his childhood to the inhabitants of the world of his exile

Coronation Street, or 'Whatever happened to our Mam?'

The early episodes of *Coronation Street* give us a very conscious attempt to transpose the themes and concerns of this type of representation of the traditional working class community into the form of the television long-running serial The close resemblance between *Coronation Street* and Hoggart's working-class landscape has often been noted Richard Dyer has traced out some of the parallels.[9] All of the figures in Hoggart's landscape make an appearance in the very first episode We are taken inside three of the terrace houses, where we find first the 'respectable' household of Hoggart's own childhood behind the front door of the Barlow's at number 3 We recognize 'Our Mam' in Mrs Barlow, the 'mester' in Ken's dad And here is Hoggart himself, the scholarship boy, 'our Ken', home from college, and looking with jaundiced eyes at the habits and practices of working-class life made strange by educational mobility

The Barlows keep a 'good' living-room, defined by Hoggart in terms of gregariousness, warmth, and plenty of good – that is to say, 'tasty' – food In number 11 there is no such comfort, for we are taken into the all-purpose kitchen of a 'rough' working-class household, the Tanners The fire is unlit, the inhabitants come and go, and quarrel noisily Elsie, long since abandoned by her husband because of her sexual misdemeanours, shouts ineffectually at her ne'er-do-well son Dennis, just out of prison and unemployed Her daughter Linda has in her turn left her own husband The differences between rough and respectable are signified with

9 Richard Dyer 'Introduction R Dyer et al Coronation Street (London BFI Publishing 1981)

economy through the differences in the dress and physique of the
two women. Mrs. Barlow, in a shapeless apron, knits pullovers for
Ken, the 'mother's boy', and places a 'proper' cooked meal of lamb
chops, tea and bread and butter in front of the menfolk as they
arrive home. Elsie exudes sexuality in her black sheath dress, and
her critical self-assessment in the mirror. She arrives home to a
disordered household and a hand-to-mouth meal of cooked ham
which has just been bought from the corner shop. There is a blazing
row between Elsie and Dennis when she accuses him of stealing two
bob from her purse.

Next door to the Barlows at number 1 – a nice touch this – we
find Uncle Albert, who identifies himself for us in terms of what,
but for the grace of God, he might have been – one of the 'old
ruins' in the reference library: '[. . .] those old men who fill the
reading-rooms of the branch public libraries. [. . .] the solitaries'.[10]
Every street, Hoggart tells us, has its corner shop which is the
housewives' club which may have its notice 'Please Do Not Ask For
Credit As A Refusal Might Offend', and here we are inside Florrie
Lindley's, who is taking over the corner shop from Elsie Lappin
who acts as Florrie's, and our, guide to Coronation Street and its
inhabitants. The notice, she tells Florrie, has been taken down long
since. Every street likewise has its pub, and Coronation Street has
the now familiar 'Rover's Return'.

They quarrel less noisily in the respectable Barlow household, but
it has tensions of its own, and as we might expect of a drama of this
provenance, the main story-line of the first episode centres on the
figure of the scholarship boy and his shamefaced critical
consciousness of class habits very different from those that obtain in

10 Hoggart, p 50

his new milieu. The chief antagonism is between father and son, and its immediate trigger is Ken's arrangement to meet his middle-class college girlfriend at the Imperial Hotel, where Ken's mother works as a cleaner Ken's brother David, the 'father's boy', who works at a local factory, articulates the 'them/us' dichotomy which Hoggart finds to be so typical of working-class perceptions of class

The credit sequence establishes a visual point-of-view 'outside and above' the Street and its inhabitants, positioning the viewer to move with the camera inside the houses and into their occupants' lives as unseen observers. To become a successful prime time television serial, *Coronation Street* had to capture the interest of a broad spectrum of viewers Although it has been argued that the conventions of realism in use in the series draw on the pleasures of recognition,[11] it was essential in those early episodes to find ways of also drawing in the viewer who would not be able to see herself in this 'landscape' because it was *not* like her own The gap between viewer/(class)-outsider, and what was viewed had to be bridged *before* the characters became familiar to regular viewers so that the Street could begin to take on a life of its own

11 R Dyer et al, *Coronation Street*

Ken Barlow acts as one surrogate for the middle-class viewer, because of his status as insider/outsider the man who moves back and forth across the class divide The entry of his girl-friend Susan into the living room brings a complete class-outsider, whom Ken has attempted to keep away for shame of his home setting The story is resolved by her good-natured willingness to 'muck in', as David and his father mend a bicycle puncture on the sitting-room floor. She shakes hands with David on a common dislike of David's boss (whom she knows because he lives in her own up-market locality), and is unconcerned when her hand is smeared by dirt from the bike

With this narrative resolution, the unacceptable face of class is redefined away from relations of exploitation and onto questions of personal style and behaviour David's boss is disliked not because he is one of 'them' but because he is personally unpleasant The terms have shifted, and the divide between middle class and working class has become negotiable It may be crossed by 'nice' middle-class individuals like Susan just as the Street will welcome viewers from more affluent sitting rooms We accepted the invitation and stayed for thirty years, in numbers that must have been beyond the wildest imaginings of the original programme planners

Coronation Street has become one of the most successful long-running serials/soaps of British television history Soap opera has attracted the attention of feminists because it is a 'woman-to-woman' form which usually centres on strong female characters The strength is in part a function of age and experience Soaps are among the few forms which offer key roles to middle-aged women, and in this respect they might seem particularly well-suited for the portrayal of households dominated by the formidable figure of 'Our

Mam' But while the interlocking stories that make up the narrative may feature older women, 'Our Mam' drops into the background, and is rarely at the centre of the plot. She entered as a stolid and immobile figure from Hoggart's memory-washed streets. There are not many stories to tell of her. Who now remembers Ken Barlow's mam? She fades into the background, like her ubiquitous apron Our Mam's function is to be, not to do Mrs Barlow died in an accident in 1961 At least she went out on a good story

The feckless Tanners were another matter Elsie not only became a major character in her own right, but has been used to identify a recognizable character-type: 'There is an "Elsie Tanner type" – sexy, rather tartily dressed, hot-tempered, impulsive – who is also recognisable in other women Rita, Suzie, Bet ' [12] The new romances which follow the broken marriages and failed affairs; the new marriages which in their turn break up, provide the very stuff of soap and starring roles for Elsie and her successors The ordered community remembered and restructured by Hoggart gives place to a different order of imaginings structured more by the demands of this particular televisual narrative form than any concern for 'truth to reality' Family life on the Street was placed within a frame which dislodged it from Hoggart's immobile landscape Today, thirty years on, the Street retains its physical look; the cat stretches sensuously in the sunshine which bathes the timeless terrace rooftops. But the human topography below bears little resemblance any more to Hoggart's Hunslet community. 'Our Ken' is the last survivor of that first episode He leaves behind him a trail of corpses. Mother, father, brother David from the first episode are long since gone His first wife was electrocuted by a faulty hairdryer, his second committed suicide A much married man, he recently embarked on an affair which caused an accrimonious break-up with his current wife, Deirdre. And if this sounds more like a furtive bluebeard than the rather timid scholarship boy from the respectable working-class home that we fondly remember, this is simply a measure of the problematic relationship between that image of the working-class community and the narrative demands of soap opera

12 Christine Geraghty The continuous serial – a definition in Dyer et al Coronation Street p 20

Domestic interiors of the British New Wave

The cycle of films classed together under this title date from the same period as *Uses of Literacy* and the early episodes of *Coronation Street*, and they are deeply marked by the same 'structure of feeling', the same class and cultural concerns It began with *Room at the Top* (1959) and *Look Back in Anger* (1959), and ended with *This Sporting Life* (1963). All were adaptations of recent novels and plays John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*; Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*; Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and *That*

Uncertain Feeling (filmed under the title *Only Two Can Play*); John Braine's *Room at the Top*; Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*; David Storey's *This Sporting Life*

The action of *Coronation Street* is largely contained by domestic interiors, plus the small-scale interiors of the pub, the corner shop, the little factory In most of these spaces women are strongly present. Even that bastion of masculinity, the local, is dominated by Annie Walker and her formidable barmaids, and although the factory in question is owned by a man, its employees are women, and when we are taken into this setting it is as likely to be to follow a story-line centring on one or more of the middle-aged women who work the machines as it is with the owner, Mike Baldwin.

In *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart sketches his domestic interiors with great care and, as we have seen, they provided models for the terrace homes of *Coronation Street* This type of setting was well-adapted to the needs and constraints of the low-budget television serial Such working-class domestic interiors are also features of the New Wave. But these films are more noted, visually, for their picturesque exteriors shot on location We do not have the same convergence of economic, formal and narrative-mythologic constraints that Paterson identifies in the case of the cheap televisual serial and the realism of *Coronation Street* [13]

Contrasting domestic interiors are not used as they were in the first episode of *Coronation Street*, to mark the differences between rough and respectable households In the films both rough and respectable carry the aura of 'authenticity' by comparison with those households that have adapted to the styles and values of mass consumerism, and it is this contrast that is drawn in the films Household interiors, the space in the streets and the city outside, are organized along axes of old and new, middle-aged and young, masculine and feminine. Typically, the films take us early on into a traditional working-class terrace similar to those of *Coronation Street* and dominated by those Hoggartian figures, 'Our Mam' and 'the mester', where the young male hero lives, to move out with him again into the more actively masculine spaces of the street, the workplace, the pub, where he negotiates potential sexual encounters These in turn draws him back into the domestic interior, this time a new-style working-class home, often on a new housing estate

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960) and *A Kind of Loving* (1962) follow this pattern Arthur Seaton, the hero of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is first located in and identified in relation to his workplace, and the city streets as he cycles home The camera follows him through the back entrance into the old terrace house where he lives with his parents Caught in the frame

13 Richard Paterson The production context of *Coronation Street*, in Dyer *et al* *Coronation Street* pp 53–66

with Arthur are icons which serve to signify an unreconstructed traditional working-class home: an old-style, free-standing, high kitchen cabinet, an elderly gas stove on legs, some battered pots and pans, and an antiquated round metal light switch with the electric cable on the outside of the wall. The men sit while 'Our Mam' stands and serves tea. The living room is furnished with heavy wooden chairs and table. Arthur, like Ken Barlow, lends this scene a critical eye in a series of close-up and point-of-view shots. But it is not class habits that attract his censure and the camera's eye ('why do we always have to have cups of tea with everything? Why do we always have bread and butter, and sauce', Ken had asked). These things are present, but unremarked. Rather it is the television set which provokes Arthur's ire, and his parents' and their generation's passivity – 'dead from the neck up'. Arthur stops only long enough to down his tea and get changed, and we are out again with him on the street for his Friday evening's entertainment.

The second interior is another terrace house much like the first, where Arthur is an interloper as he spends the night with his workmate's wife Brenda. In the morning we get a second series of point-of-view shots, this time around the bedroom, which returns to a close-up of a smiling Arthur well-pleased at his own temerity, from a pan which picks up the various markers that identify Robbo as the legitimate occupant. This, too, is an interior on which he makes a temporary raid, careless of the risks he runs. As Robbo enters the back door, Arthur leaves by the front.

The third domestic interior we enter with Arthur is that of his new girlfriend Doreen's mother. This one is on a new working-class

estate As with Brenda's, he enters in pursuit of sexual conquest, and it is an interior from which he is twice ejected before making it with Doreen on the living-room floor This interior bears all the marks of Hoggart's new working-class consumerism. The kitchen is a fitted one the living-room furniture is 'fifties modern', with a glass fronted china cabinet The walls are hung with 'contemporary' wallpaper, with wall-mounted lights and flush doors. Since Brenda's father has left fifteen years previously, the affluence we see flouts socio-economic logic Arthur's household, with two adult male 'affluent workers' should, logically, be the more prosperous of the two But this cycle of films persistently portrays the status-conscious woman as the vulnerable point of entry for seductions which might betray a class and its culture, and this moral imperative overrides, it seems, any commitment to sociological realism The missing figure in the new status-conscious, high-spending household is the one which, paradoxically, is in reality a condition of its possibility, the relatively well-paid working man. Both *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Kind of Loving*'s 'new working-class' households are female-headed, father-absent, despite the anomaly that the working-class aspirations they represent could only be realized by women through access to a male wage The young male protagonist has, then, a relationship to 'feminine' domestic space in these films which is problematic both personally and ideologically Sexual encounters are typically initiated outside, in space which is conventionally regarded as masculine, but consumated inside, in stereotypically feminine space He must therefore enter inside, but he risks either punishment (the beating of Arthur by the squaddies) or containment (marriage to Doreen) as a result

Aesthetic strategies and urban landscapes

The basis on which the British New Wave staked its cinematic claims was a realism defined in terms of its working-class subject, and a more open treatment of sexuality, as well as its aesthetic form Lindsay Anderson, one of the foremost New Wave directors and a leading figure in Free Cinema, had characterized the dominant British cinema in harsh terms It was '[.] completely middle-class bound Ealing Studios comedies – for example *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, and the like Emotionally quite frozen' [14] British cinema was disparaged for its class restraint, its snobbishness, its sexual repression, its general lack of cinematic flair David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945) was the paradigm Set in the North of England, its 'upstairs' characters spoke impeccable standard English while 'downstairs' (or rather, behind the counter in the station tea-room) they sported cockney – the multi-purpose accent which was made to serve for *all* working-class speech But realism has suffered badly in

14 As quoted in Charles Barr *Ealing Studios* (London Cameron & Tayleur 1977) p 119

the critical values created by developments within film theory in the past twenty years. And the repertoire of images, narrative concerns and characters of the New Wave quickly became over-familiar, and its style soon lost its initial freshness of effect. 'Poetic realism' began to seem to critics and film theorists less a break with the past than a confirmation of a limited cinematic imagination. 'Isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms "Cinema" and 'British"?' Truffault had asked Hitchcock in 1955, an implicit judgement echoed by Victor Perkins writing about New Wave directors in 1972 [15]

15 François Truffaut *Hitchcock* (London Panther, 1969) p 140

There has been a revival of critical interest in British cinema, but while this has produced some interesting studies of New Wave films, it has typically taken the form of deconstructing the ideological work of the films, dismantling the critical claims made under the banner of the new realism. Popular forms which had been dismissed within orthodox criticism such as the Hammer horror, Gainsborough melodramas, or even the ubiquitous *Carry On* comedies, and the quirky idiosyncracies of Powell and Pressburger, fared rather better in this critical reassessment of British cinema [16]

16 For some examples of this work see James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds) *British Cinema History* (London Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1983)

17 John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* (London BFI Publishing, 1986), chs 6 and 7, Andrew Higson 'Space place spectacle', *Screen*, vol 25 no 4/5 (1984), pp 2–21

The New Wave was the subject of a major study of British realist cinema by John Hill In his chapters on the New Wave, Hill built on the work of Andrew Higson, who had subjected a number of the films to close analysis in the pages of *Screen* [17] The analysis developed by Higson centred on the representation of place in the New Wave, and on the films' use of exteriors rather than interiors Although all of the films of the cycle draw attention to their northern industrial townscapes, the film which springs most readily to mind when its iconographical repertoire of place is recalled is *A Taste of Honey*

While frequently referred to in critical discussion of the New Wave, *A Taste of Honey* is rarely analysed When it is, the analysis centres on the sequences shot on location. Shelagh Delaney's play was entirely set in 'a comfortless flat in Manchester'. While the film retains much of the original dialogue, it takes us out of this setting for the location sequences which give the film its most striking visual images. We are shown Jo in school, at work as a salesgirl in a local shoe-shop, walking the canals and streets of Manchester, at the fair, and on a trip to Blackpool The director of photography was Walter Lassally, and his widely praised camerawork was responsible for imprinting the images that became shorthand for the Northern industrial working-class community. This repertoire of images soon staled into cliché Each of the films has its shots of canals, street scenes, the pub, the fairground, the bus journey, the visit to the nearby countryside. *A Taste of Honey* above all the other films, gives priority to place. 'It is place, rather than action, which assumes importance' [18]

18 Hill, p 131

New Wave realism was characterized by Lindsay Anderson as

'poetic realism'. The term was associated with the work of the documentary filmmaker Humphrey Jennings, who was a potent point of reference for New Wave directors in general and Anderson in particular The concept of *poetic* realism allowed the New Wave directors to stress the personal vision of the observer/filmmaker as well as the authenticity of what was observed. John Hill gives us a careful and convincing analysis of the relationship between the film's aesthetic and narrative strategies. The photography of *A Taste of Honey* draws attention to itself. It does not create an unobtrusive backdrop to the narrative like the 'invisible' style of realism favoured by French and British *auteur* critics, in which camera movement is subordinated to the demands of the narrative, and in which the mark of directorial 'art' is found in the mise-en-scene Hill observes that the shots of the urban landscape in *A Taste of Honey* as in other New Wave films are redundant in terms of the narrative They serve to slow down the action and oblige the viewer to pay attention to the film's pictorial beauty. For narrative drive we substitute the pleasures of spectacle – townscapes made picturesque, squalor aestheticized. Hill gives a number of examples. there are eight shots, lasting 27 seconds, of a Manchester street parade and its crowd of onlookers before the scene is motivated by a cut to Jo, there is a multiplication of shots in the sequence in which Jo returns from school – seven shots lasting 50 seconds before the appearance of Jimmie. Hill argues that this 'authentic' photography of recognizably 'real' landscapes has a double function It signifies the 'real', but also what would seem to be its opposite, creative art 'It is precisely through the production of a "realistic" surplus that the film marks the authorial voice, the signification of reality becomes at the same time the site of personal expression'
(p 132)

As modern linguistic theory has demonstrated, there is in all forms of enunciation, even first person speech about the self, a gap between the point of enunciation and that which is spoken of between the 'I' and the 'me' In New Wave realism, there is a good deal of conventional point-of-view shooting, but this does not and cannot close the gap between the camera's view and that of the protagonist Even in those early parts of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* where Arthur's visual point of view is reinforced by his voice-over commentary, the gap remains The camera, by including Arthur within the frame, and by showing more than Arthur sees, allows the film to establish some critical distance from him But the highly stylized location sequences analysed by Hill, in particular the shot which Higson terms 'That Long Shot of Our Town From That Hill', a view. like that of the opening credit shot of *Coronation Street*. from 'outside and above'. opens up a broad chasm between the observing eye of the camera and that of the observer within the landscape Higson argues that this shot. along with others which

serve to place the character in the environment, inscribes a middle-class observer/outsider as viewer, and as the source of the film's enunciation Hill concurs, arguing further that this outsider's point-of-view gives to the films' relatively open (for the period) treatment of sexuality a certain rather unpleasant voyeurism which he links to 'bourgeois obsession with cleanliness, fascination with working-class squalor and sexuality'. (p 136)

While acknowledging the existence of the gap identified in Hill's analysis between observer and observed, I would want to argue that it opens up space which the viewer may occupy in a number of ways, and that there is one category of viewer in particular who is best placed to enjoy the pleasures of these texts from that space, namely Hoggart's scholarship boy the adult working-class male looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape. It is not an outsider's perspective, but that of someone deeply implicated in and familiar with what is observed: someone who has left that life behind, yet with a considerable sense of loss in moving through the educational system, and who therefore brings to its observation the knowledge of the insider combined with the distance achieved by the move outside and beyond It is this position which can align itself most readily and personally with the point of enunciation of many of the New Wave films Within the familiar landscape, such a viewer is offered a potent figure of identification in the young, sexually active male worker, because he may identify in him a fantasy projection of the self he might have become had he remained

And what of the female viewer? It is perfectly possible of course to identify across gender as well as class lines and no doubt this frequently occurred in relation to these films. Hill recognizes the vividness of the New Wave's more direct acknowledgement of sexuality, but registers its gender bias. The sexuality that erupts in 'resistance to refinement and repression' is a masculine sexuality (p 163) The women in the films are split between those who answer the sexual desire of the hero with an equal and equally raunchy desire of their own (Brenda in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) and those who, while less confident of their own active sexuality, draw the hero into marriage and conformity through his sexual attraction to her. Hill comments that '[   ] the insufficiency of marriage is structured in relation to *male* desire, not, as in film noir, to female' (p 166) and links the films' misogyny to the gendered perception of the transition from old to new working-class values of the New Left. It is characters like Doreen in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and Ingrid and her mother in *A Kind of Loving* whose actions curtail the more radical emancipatory impulses of the hero It is the scholarship boy, drawing on a Hoggartian analysis of the undermining of the traditional working-class community by mass consumer culture, who is perhaps himself married to a middle-class

woman, who can most fully inhabit the point of enunciation identified by Higson and Hill

In *A Taste of Honey* the positioning of the viewer is more mixed. Hill analyses those films which have a male hero in terms of the narrative choice he faces between the sexy but forbidden adulterous woman and the less experienced, more inhibited younger woman he eventually marries and who channels his sexuality into conforming domesticity in the new class style The sexuality of the hero is contained by marriage in sexually conservative resolutions. Hill argues that films like *A Taste of Honey* which centre on a female protagonist present the heroine with a parallel choice between sexuality and domesticity. Jimmie is seen as the male equivalent of Brenda, Geof of Doreen For Jo the choice is only a little more starkly presented. With Jimmie she may have sexuality without domesticity, with Geof domesticity without sexuality

To make this reading of *A Taste of Honey*, we have to ignore much of the dialogue that passes between the characters as well as the associations which are created between Jo, Jimmie and Geoff on the one hand, and on the other, the children whose songs, skipping, and rhyming games are never long absent from screen or soundtrack Jimmie is not a male equivalent of Brenda, and Jo's attraction to him is only ambivalently a sexual one, expressed in dialogue such as 'Don't do that'. 'Why not?' 'I like it ' 'I hate love', and so on, all of which are taken from the play It is Helen rather than Jo who is given an active, urgent sexuality. Jimmie, moreover cannot be set against an a-sexual domesticated Geof. They are alike in their possession of stereotypically feminine characteristics In the play we are informed that Jimmie was a nurse before his national service took him into the navy. He is as much at home in Jo's kitchen as is Geof In the film, Jimmie is the ship's cook He takes Jo on board to bathe and dress her grazed knee, lifting her onto the work-surface to do so as a mother might an injured child The last time we see him he is sitting on deck, in his chef's cap, preparing vegetables as his ship moves slowly down the canal to the sea. His well-ordered galley produces substantial meals, where nothing except coffee comes out of Jo and Helen's squalid kitchen

We have not only a generation role-reversal, then, between Jo and Helen, with Helen comprehensively refusing the maternal role, but two role-positionings between Jo and both Jimmie and Geoff which entail gender-reversals for the two males Jimmie figures as mother-surrogate as much as lover, also as fellow child Like Jo, he is associated with the children He hopscotches his way along the pavement in a childish motion which repeats the games we have watched the children play Jo and Jimmie play hide-and-seek around the ship, and play with a toy car ('what rubbish little boys have in their pocket') Although the relationship with Jimmie is sexual,

whereas that with Geof is exclusively domestic, no sharp contrast can be drawn between the two men. Both are outsiders. Jimmie is doubly marginalized because he is a transient sailor and black, Geof because he is gay, and an art student (as Jo herself might have been). Both men are nurturant Geof, like Jimmie, is skilled at domestic tasks He cooks for Jo, cleans the flat, and sews baby clothes. He too offers the 'mothering' which Helen refuses and which Jimmie, because he must leave with his ship, can give only in passing.

Hill's and Higson's analyses work best on those parts of *A Taste of Honey* which were introduced in the film, and have no counterpart in Delaney's play – the location sequences in and around Manchester, and the visit to Blackpool. In these sequences we find the familiar concern with the quality of new working-class culture, expressed within the visual terms and references common to the New Wave. Richardson attempts to organize the contrast between old and new through his use of the children to represent the traditional community and its indigenous culture. Higson's claim that the children 'represent the future' is therefore misleading. They may be linked to the child which Jo, emotionally still scarcely more than a child herself, is carrying But also in a stronger sense they represent the past the childhood, as well as the childishness, of the young people of the story, and an earlier, more 'authentic' way of life which has been lost This link, clearly drawn in the play, is obscured in the film For its closing images of Jo and the children, watched in the shadows by Geof, as they light sparklers around the bonfire, their faces alive with childish wonder, belong in the play to *Helen*'s childhood memories In a speech towards the play's close, she says

'You know when I was young we used to play all day long this time of the year; in the summer we had singing games and in the spring we played with tops and hoops, and then in the autumn there was the Fifth of November, then we used to have bonfires in the street, and gingerbread and all that.' (p 85)

In transposing these associations from Helen's past to Jo, while retaining the punctuation of the action by the seasonal round of fairs and festive processions, the film actually succeeds in giving Jo a ten-and-a-half month pregnancy, in spite of its much-proclaimed realism Conceived after a Christmas-time visit to Blackpool, the baby is still awaited on Bonfire Night. In the film, then, adult memories of and longings for a lost childhood are replaced by real children who are used to forge a division between the adults and the young people. Instead of figuring Helen's lost past, they mock and plague her as she goes off with her 'fancy man' Peter. They are linked throughout with Jo and Geoff They follow them to the arches, and accompany

them on the bus-ride to the country where we get the statutory Long Shot of Our Town From That Hill.

It is the adults who are made to represent the shoddy new consumerism. Helen's aspirations are epitomized by the bungalow which Peter buys on their marriage. Peter is a used car salesman, shifty, drunken, and lecherous. The visit to Blackpool offers an opportunity for a sequence which could have come from any one of these films, and which is reminiscent, as Hill points out, of Anderson's Free Cinema documentary *O Dreamland* (1953) – no matter that these particular working-class pastimes cannot strictly be attributed to 'mass culture', belonging as they do to much older working-class cultural traditions. We are given close-up shots of Helen and Peter and their friends as they cavort around the funfair, with an angle of vision and closeness to the face that produce similar visual distortions to those of the hall of mirrors. A grotesquely dressed-up Jo, unwanted, bloody-minded, and trailing a few yards behind, offers a point from which the spectator can position him/ herself in alienation from the scene while, just in case we haven't got the point, the whole montage sequence is accompanied by raucous pop music and the loud, empty laughter of a mechanical clown.

The mass culture/traditional culture paradigm is superimposed, then, on the narrative material of the play, and it is this original material as it is transposed into film which justifies Higson's perception that *A Taste of Honey* is a woman's picture.[19] This leaves the film fractured, with a double vision, as it were. The mass culture themes cannot be effectively pursued through Delaney's narrative,

19 Andrew Higson, 'Critical theory and "British cinema"', *Screen*, vol 24, no 4/5 (1983), pp 80–95

because all of her characters are, like Carolyn Steedman's mother, figures who have no place within the Hoggartian working-class landscape in which the dichotomies of these themes had their genesis. Helen and Jo exist on the margins of working-class culture and community Both are single parents, Helen sexually promiscuous, Jo inexperienced, yet pregnant at sixteen. Helen doesn't work, but has no visible means of support other than her 'fancy men'. Neither could be said by any stretch of the imagination to partake of Hoggart's 'full, rich life'. They flit from one bleak rooming house to another, living out of a couple of suitcases.

The economy of interior and exterior space in a film is organized in interesting ways when the protagonist is a woman rather than a man. The street and the public places of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Kind of Loving* are associated, as we have seen, with a dominant male sexuality that gains access to domestic interiors and sexual gratification, but ultimately is contained through marriage Because private and public places are culturally gendered, they will be available for different sets of signification when the film centres on a young woman Jo, like Arthur, moves between domestic interiors and the streets and countryside, but the two spaces are organized in this film less by gender than by generation The streets are dominated not by sexually active young men but by children. Jo is poised between childhood and womanhood, precipitated into adult life by her affair with Jimmie and her pregnancy, and her moves outside may be related to her reluctance to abandon childhood rather than the masculine search for sexual encounters, while the interior of her flat is associated with her search for nurturance rather than sex. The few sexual encounters and attempts thereat take place not in the flat, but outside, from Jimmie and Jo's first kiss under a starlit sky on Jimmie' s ship to Geof's clumsy attempt to 'start something' on the hillside later In the play, Jimmie and Jo make love in the flat when her mother is away in Blackpool. In the film they begin to make love on waste ground and there is no indication that they move indoors to take advantage of Helen's absence and the availability of an empty double bed The effect of this open air lovemaking is less to associate the outside with sex, than the sex with the transition from childhood

The temporalities of the film are rhythmic and cyclical, and it is not perhaps too fanciful to invoke here Julia Kristeva's concept of 'woman's time' [20] The action covers a little less than a year, a little more than the baby's nine month gestation It is punctuated by the annual round of fairs and holidays. And Jo repeats Helen's story When she kisses Jimmie on the ship, we cut to what we at first mistake for the starry sky overhead, to the ceiling of the ballroom where Helen and Peter dance the last waltz, covered with crystal stars What I want to suggest is that Delaney's play did not inhabit

20 Julia Kristeva 'Woman s time', *Signs* vol 7, no 1 (1981) Reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader* edited by Toril Moi (Oxford Blackwell, 1986)

the structure of feeling articulated by *The Uses of Literacy* but was
sutured onto it in the film adaptation. It is concerned in addition
with a very different set of issues which we can begin to discern
more clearly in the light of the women's movement which has since
supervened.

In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich writes of the lack of stories of
'the passion and rapture'[21] of mother-daughter relationships in a
culture in which the father-child relationship is at the centre of one
of the most powerful 'interpretive devices of our culture', Freud's
'family romance'. Freudianism theorizes what has been dramatized
in high art from *Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet*. It gives us a way of seeing
the little boy, jealous of his father, the powerful rival for his first
love-object, his mother. It allows us to see the little girl, jealous of
her mother, rival for the attentions of her second love-object, her
father once she has shifted into her own Oedipal phase. What is
harder to see is the little girl jealous not of her mother, but of her
mother's lover, raging against her own neglect.

The women's movement has radically altered the situation
described by Rich. It is true that its early years produced little of
'passion and rapture' in its presentation of mothers and mothering
by the daughters who forged the movement. The tone of an earlier
generation towards its mothers was distinctly hostile, while children
featured as impediments at best in the struggle for liberation, to be
cared for communally in twenty-four hour nurseries.

More recent developments within feminism have returned with a
vengeance to the question of women's mothering, and mother-
daughter/daughter-mother stories are now legion. In fiction we have

22 Michele Roberts *A Piece of the Night* (London The Women s Press, 1978), Jeanette Winterson *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (London Pandora 1985)

23 Nancy Chodorow *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1978), Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, *What do Women Want?* (London Fontana/Collins, 1983)

a huge range of examples, from Michele Roberts's *A Piece of the Night* to Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* [22] We have the poetry and essays of Adrienne Rich. We have the recovery and reworking of myths such as that of Persephone and Demeter We have Nancy Chodorow's work, and that of the Woman's Therapy movement,[23] and there is no doubt that there are resources here to stimulate new readings of *A Taste of Honey*. But because of the masculine address of this whole group of New Wave films, the masculine identity of their visual enunciation, and because *A Taste of Honey* is visually and generically at one with them, it has attracted little attention from feminists

I want to end where I began, with Carolyn Steedman's mother-daughter story For it would, I think, be as much of an error to map *A Taste of Honey* exclusively onto the terms in which mothering has been discussed recently within feminist thought as it would be to do the same with Steedman's tale In Steedman we find no trace of yearning for a pre-Oedipal utopia, nor yet any echoing fragments of Kristeva's semiotic chora The experiences of mothering and of being a daughter are placed in historical and social time, not in Kristeva's non-linear 'woman's time' They are mapped onto the lineaments of class as well as those of gender We may look back in gender, drawing upon the (re-worked) stories of Freud's family romance, but we would lose as much as we gained if, in the process, the context of mothering as a social institution with a history and a class and ethnic specificity were to be lost from sight

Screening desire

PETER BENSON

IN critical writing, we are apt to use 'the cinema', as a substantive
term, to refer to the art as a whole (albeit an uncompletable whole,
to which 'contributions' are made), a substance whose divisible
aspects (historical, economic, aesthetic, significatory) may then be
separately studied Yet cinema also designates a specific, carefully-
controlled environment which, until recently (when video disrupted
its dominance) was a necessary condition for the consumption of this
art, a room whose similarity to Plato's cave has occasionally been
noted (either with irony, or as part of a stolid conflation of the
history of representation).

There is one element of this room, a feature of its formality, to
which attention has rarely been paid and yet whose virtually
universal presence must lead us to suspect some significance, some
precise role in the economy designated by the other sense of 'the
cinema' As the film is ending, the final credits rolling upwards (the
laboratories, colour processes, and copyright symbols), thick opaque
curtains close across the screen, sealing it from our sight, ending
'the show', as if the naked screen must definitely *not* be shown,
once the film is finished, at the risk of some impropriety

What is veiled in this way is nothing a blank rectangle of uniform
whiteness A rectangle, moreover, which has been 'visible' (in the
sense of being *un*veiled) throughout the screening Yet its modesty
was then protected by the shifting veil of images, to which it lent its
substance Condition of the film's *visibility*, the intelligibility of
space demands the screen's *disappearance·* the gaze (physiologically
focussed unvaryingly *on* the screen's surface) looks beyond that
surface, into the unfurlment of fiction

These problematics of illusory space have been widely discussed in

the literature, but still do not explain the final discreet covering of their support Might not the well-attested 'magic' of cinema be enhanced by the final spectacle of the screen itself, unscathed by the wars and passions it has offered to our eyes – like a magician's assistant emerging unblemished from the box where she has been (apparently) sliced through with a savage saw?

In *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985), the heroine (Roberta), labouring beneath a pathology of disguises, adopts this very role. We see the illusion of her body cut in two, and parted from itself But, before she can be recombined, the performance is disrupted by a member of the audience. An apparently crazed man (whom we know to be infected with narrative desire – in search of the stolen ear-rings) snatches the blonde wig from Roberta's head, revealing her fairly similar blonde hair underneath. Perhaps the ultimate power of illusions is to hide the truth which they mime

What is more, at two points during the narrative, a cinema audience within the film finds itself watching a blank screen, and reacts with noisy annoyance Dez, the projectionist, has failed in his task of effacing the space between one reel and the next. The show must continue, not pause on the nudity of the screen The technology of cinema, in doubling the number of projectors needed to ensure seamless continuity of the image, duplicates the gesture implicit in the closing curtains.

In the psychoanalytic papers of Bertram Lewin,[1] dreamers are said to perceive their dreams on a screen, as if at the cinema He reaches this conclusion from the evidence of certain visually blank dreams, in which the 'dream screen' is present, without the imprint of images. In the history of psychoanalytic literature, this is one of the few metaphors taken directly from the cinema (an industrialized art coeval with the industrialization of self-knowledge by psychoanalysis). Although the evidence which Lewin presents, for the universality of a 'screen' within (behind) every dream, is far from convincing, his conclusions may nevertheless be of value in comprehending the economy of the cinema.

The screen, he contends, represents the mother's breast, flattened by the weight of the baby's head, against which the satiated infant falls into a sleep undisturbed (at first) by the imagery of unsatisfied wishes So the cinema screen is a breast from which we imbibe our sustenance of images and narratives (which, beyond a certain level of personal and cultural growth, have a significance greater than, and thus supplanting, that of food) Nor do the pretensions of art free us entirely from the oral drives invoked. Hence the curiously intimate connection of eating and drinking with film viewing the array of popcorn, soft drinks, and candy bars on sale in the foyer of every cinema. The archetypal representation of The Film Viewer (particularly in American comedies: e g Jerry Lewis in the prologue

1 B Lewin 'Sleep, the mouth and the dream screen *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* vol 15 (1946) 'Inferences from the dream screen' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol 29 (1948)

to *Hollywood or Bust* (1956) is of someone continuously consuming food and drink, while their eyes remain fixed to the image flow. It is an archetype evoked in the final moments of *Desperately Seeking Susan*, when Jim and Susan gleefully munch popcorn in front of the pure brilliance of a blank screen, their enjoyment contrasting with the rest of the rowdy audience, whose diet of fantasy has been interrupted Jim and Susan know that the flames which have burned away the celluloid image are an index (though not a representation) of the passion between Roberta and Dez, whose kissing in the projection booth has damaged the machinery

Normally, when not giving milk to the needy child (when detached from the circuit of passion), the maternal breasts must be covered, like the screen when the lights are not dim. Film is a veil of images over the mother's breast, and in this film the supreme Mother (the Madonna herself – whose blatant sexuality authorizes her to be treated 'like a virgin', in a parodic echo of Catholic theology) is several times seen wearing a partially transparent black bra. The interdiction on the maternal body is readily transferred to such idealized media stars, and a well-publicized fuss occurred when nude photographs of Madonna, taken before she acquired the mantle of fame, were published in *Penthouse* The primal seen of her naked body had acquired value (monetary) by a deferred action, through her subsequent success. In the film, however, her breasts are simultaneously covered and displayed by fetishistic clothing, acceding to the condition of cinema.

If the dream screen marks the furthest limit of our regressive phantasy, dissolving in originary unity with our mother, the stories which are played out across its surface trace the labyrinthine barriers established by the oedipal moment which is not the *origin* of phantasy, but its principal field of elaboration 'Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?' asked Roland Barthes[2] and, in the following paragraph, he discussed the economy of fetishism as the foundation of narrative pleasure *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in its total typicality, is an oedipal narrative organized around the circulation of fetish objects Madonna/Susan, following the destiny of her name, can be seen to occupy the structural role of Mother in the constitution of Roberta's subjectivity

Jackie Stacey, in her discussion of the film,[3] overlooks (with possibly polemical intent) the oedipal triads through which the story progresses, declaring 'the difference which produces the narrative desire in *Desperately Seeking Susan* is not sexual difference, but the difference between two women in the film' (p 59) Narrative desire, however, is rarely, if ever, reducible to a binary relation between two differentiated individuals It is, rather, constructed in a triadic formation, as desire for desire, articulated by Freud in the theory of the Oedipus complex By interpreting Susan as Roberta's Ideal Ego, and specifically referring this notion to the Lacanian mirror phase

2 R Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (London Cape 1976) p 47

3 J Stacey Desperately seeking difference *Screen* vol 28 no 1 (1987) pp 48–62

4 Cf also my Identification and slaughter *CineAction* no 12 (1988), pp 12–18

(p. 61), Stacey exemplifies the dangers of too complete a reliance on Lacanian concepts in film theory without considering their Freudian framework.[4] As Barthes recognized, the Oedipus complex is, in Freud's theory, the origin of all storytelling. It is this complex which places us *at a distance* from the screen/breast, *taking an interest* in the tales and mysteries which unfold before us

In alternating contact and separation from the breasts, the baby learns to distinguish 'I' from 'you' (learns to count from 'one' to 'two') But a completely different order of existence is opened when the infant becomes aware, not only of the relation of other people to itself, but their relation *to each other* It is this moment which Freud sought to clarify, in simplified form, by his hypothesis of the oedipal drama Its principal features could be generalized outside the situation of a child being brought up by one member from each sex Between two or more people, the child discerns a relationship which has nothing to do with itself, and from which it is excluded. ('Sex', says Freud, offering a pertinent example) The fascinated child can apprehend this dimension only through phantasy (and hence finds the means to count from 'two', the binary relation, to 'three', the relation of narrative, society, and desire).

It is this position of exclusion which we adopt again each time we sit in a cinema seat and allow ourselves to be interested in the relationships depicted on the screen. That of Roberta to Susan for example. Turned towards each other, they exclude us and inaugurate *our* desire (the desire to watch, to write critical essays and so forth). Within the film's story, Jim and Susan also share a relation which is both private and public. They communicate through the personal columns of a daily paper, where their secret 'desperation' for each other may be read by anyone. Such messages pass blind before indifferent eyes, but *narrative* begins when Roberta's desire for desire inserts itself into this circuit, forming the primary triad.

The meeting place for the primal scene is equally public Roberta, placing herself in the role of the voyeuristic child, makes use of a commercial medium to gratify her scopophilia (just as we use the cinema). she spies on Jim and Susan through public pay binoculars But when Susan wraps her legs round Jim, and they kiss passionately, the image is occluded (by the coin expiring), marking its forbiddenness Roberta lacks the potency (sufficient change for the machine) to be a part of this passion.

Like the child, she must find a place of her own within the sexual diad. It is on the basis of such initially *triadic* desire that dual relationships form.[5] For this (since the film in no way challenges her already gendered identity) she must acquire the attributes of the mother, her potency, symbolized as the maternal Phallus.

Freud describes how a child seeks to catch a glimpse of that most elusive of objects: its mother's penis When the child discovers its

5 My discussion here though following the lines of Freudian theory owes much to Rene Girard s classic study, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Baltimore Johns Hopkins Press 1966)

Desperately Seeking Susan
(Courtesy of Rank Films and the
BFI stills archive)

6 S Freud. *Fetishism* (1927).
(Standard Edition, vol XXI)

absence, this elusiveness is transformed into displacement, and almost any object associated with the mother can take on the symbolic role of her Phallus.[6] In the economy of desire. this metonymy frees the child from incestuous fixation. Objects and attributes can be associated with many different people, lacking the specificity of '*my* mother's penis'. In both Freudian and Lacanian theory. it is the woman's lack of a penis which supports the metonymy of desire. its endless displacement. Hence. for Lacan, the term 'Phallus' always refers to the *maternal* penis. and is not to be confused with a bodily organ.

The fetish which symbolizes Susan's Phallus is her jacket: an

enfolding female object, in the pocket of which, however, is the classic Freudian phallic replacement: a key. This key unlocks Susan's identity (stored in a luggage locker), but simultaneously locks Roberta into a plot she has not initiated. The Phallus cannot be possessed without unforeseeable consequences.

Roberta *buys* the jacket (resorting to her minimum potency of cash) after Susan swops it for an equally fetishistic pair of boots. Susan, free from fixation, can change her fetishes as easily as she does her lovers. As a clinical phenomenon, fetishism is almost exclusively a male trait. But this 'fact' is misleading. With greater freedom in their mode of dress, women can drape themselves in fetishes without being classified as 'a clinical phenomenon'. Madonna has amply demonstrated this, and bestows her own style on the fictional Susan.

The jacket embodies the endless displacements which form the underlying logic of fetishism (and of narrative). It can absorb the charisma of anyone it has cloaked, in phantasy or reality. 'Once belonged to Jimi Hendrix,' Susan tells the storekeeper who, assessing Roberta's tastes as rather more staid, repeats: 'once belonged to Elvis Presley'. Indeed, one could imagine the film's
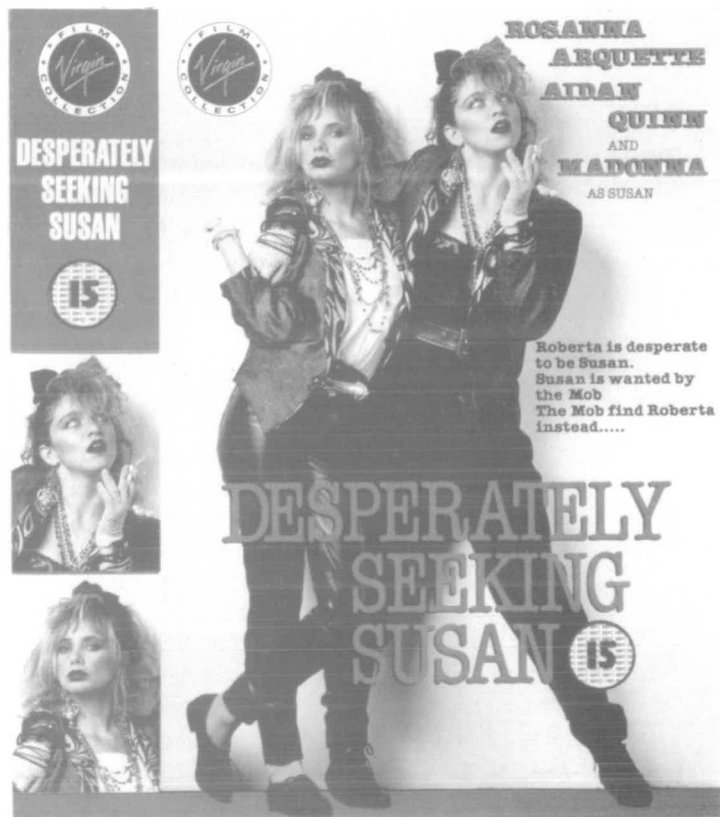
Video cover, *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Courtesy of MCEG Virgin Vision)

prop department auctioning the jacket with the alluring attraction 'worn by Rosanna Arquette in *Desperately Seeking Susan*'.

On the poster advertising the film, Roberta and Susan are shown (arms around each other) both wearing identical jackets. This image appears nowhere in the film (not even in the final shot), but is duplicated on the sleeve of Madonna's 'Into The Groove' single. Narrative requires a *unique* fetish, which can serve as a Hitchcockian MacGuffin and be the site of conflict This is not necessary in the non-narrative, utopian art of film posters and pop singles.

The principal MacGuffin of the film's plot, the stolen Egyptian ear-rings, also appear in the poster, with one worn by Susan, the other by Roberta Unique (irreplaceable) yet doubled: the ear-rings have a curious status When Susan, brushing up her image in a public washroom, clips *one* of them to her ear, she succeeds in splitting this fetish, the object of violent desire (pursued by a dangerous gunman). Her style of dress (adopted by both women in the advertising poster) allows a single ear-ring to be worn, without thereby generating a symmetrical lack (an absence later to be filled) This lack of a lack constitutes her freedom within the phallic economy which traps Roberta who, believing in the uniqueness of the fetish, falls under its power Having draped herself in Susan's jacket, she *becomes* Susan (through the device of amnesia)

The little girl of the oedipal triad has found her place as the mother, and her reward is (an appropriate substitute for) the father Dez, this substitute figure, even looks quite similar to Jim (a fact he confirms as a prelude to his first kiss with Roberta) But amnesia (repression) offers too swift a negotiation of the oedipal drama, and the immediate results are far from satisfactory She is punished in the mother's place (thrown out of a café where Susan caused trouble) Nor has she acquired Susan's resourcefulness (she doesn't even know how to smoke)

Her task (and the ideological project of the film) will be to sublate this split in her personality which the oedipal crisis has caused. Triadic desire requires that we *become* someone else whilst remaining ourselves (Girard, p. 54). Freud's thesis is that our entry into the gendered network of society is dependent on just such a dilemma, never to be fully or finally resolved [7] Hence its persistent return, as a structuring principle, in the fascination of stories

The division of the ear-rings between the two women is a mark of this splitting Only when they are brought together at the end can a reward be granted and the film close As a narrative object, the ear-rings perform a classic circulation, returning finally to the place from which they were stolen

Such an organization of narrative around the circulation of a significant object among diverse characters and places is one of the most frequent forms of storytelling In the cinema, *Winchester 73*

7 The little girl s identification with her mother will fix the child s feminine character *The Ego and the Id* (Standard Edition vol XIX, p 32)

8 J Lacan Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*, Yale French Studies no 48 (1972)

9 K Marx *Capital*, vol 1 (London Lawrence & Wishart 1954) p 76

10 Cf Language, precisely is based on fetishist denial (I know that but just the same   The sign is not the thing, but just the same   etc) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror* (New York Columbia University Press 1982) p 37

(Anthony Mann, 1950) is a typical example, the gun of the title tracing the trajectory of the tale   In literature, similar eponymous objects are found in numerous narratives, such as Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*. The latter has received a well-known analysis by Jacques Lacan, in terms of the object's role in oedipal triangles, which is one of his most pertinent texts for film and literary studies.[8]

Poe's letter and the Egyptian ear-rings are finally returned to their starting points, but their circulation has not been without effect: in the Poe story, the downfall of a government minister; in this film, the separation of Roberta from her husband.

Yet the film is not called *The Egyptian Ear-rings*. Its actual title evokes not a prized object, but the force (desperation) of desire. And not only is the valuable object doubled (divided), it is also displaced from the centre of the narration, supplanted by the more prominent jacket, whose value is entirely symbolic, its back displaying a *representation* of the design on a dollar bill

'Value,' wrote Marx, 'converts every product into a social hieroglyphic   Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products, for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language'.[9] No object could be more worthy of our deciphering than this jacket, a Rosetta stone on which the economic fetishism of commodities (analysed by Marx) intersects with the sexual fetishism analysed by Freud

Psychoanalysis portrays fetishism as the origin of symbolization as such, and of the differentiated cathexes of the symbolic field.[10] Symbolic psychic value arises from an erased origin (the mother's penis), and is founded on the moment of that erasure   Capitalism, for Marx, operates an equivalent and progressive erasure of the origin of Value in objectified labour.

Discussing the financial reward in Poe's story, Lacan describes money as 'that signifier most destructive of all signification' (p. 68). The reasons for this are clear   A signifier is always replaceable by other signifiers, across the chains of association in the paradigmatic dimension of language   But it cannot be replaced, indifferently, by *any* other signifier, on pain of a total collapse of the differentiations upon which signification depends   Money, exchangeable for *any* object in the 'free market' of capitalist economics, performs just this activity of destruction   But sexual fetishism acts contrary to this movement of generalized equivalence, forming objects of desire from discarded clothing, suffusing items of production with an order of value commensurate neither with that of use, nor that of labour   This jacket, in particular, evades the collapse of signification by bearing on its back a signifier of that most destructive of signifiers (like a talisman representing the features of the power against which it protects its owner). It is thus one step removed, on the ladder of

metalanguages, from the monetary chain. Similarly, it is but a single step away from the phantasized penis of the mother its shape and form already sketching an awareness of female genitalia (a key in a pocket could be a neat metaphor for the clitoris; the distinctive lapels eroticize labial regions of folds and edges). Hence it is enabled to function at the join of these two domains of psychic and social economics, taking on its narrative significance at the very moment (in the shop) when Susan's bartering is displaced by monetary commerce

Susan cannot cross this divide (lacking even the cab fare to reach Roberta) Nor can Roberta decipher the jacket's many layers of significance Lost in imaginary identification with Susan, she nevertheless carries on her back an inscribed hieroglyph of the symbolic order· a pyramidal motif surmounted by an eye, unrecognized memorial to the voyeuristic triangle through which her present identity was precipitated.

In that initial enactment of the primal scene, Roberta was the subject of a gaze which, in its desperate desire for desire, created a division in her subjectivity. She now seeks to regain a unitary identity (on the 'parental' side of the triangle) by becoming the *object* of a confirming and locating gaze. 'Look at *me*,' she pleads with her husband at the end of the film, and it is his failure to respond to *this* injunction which persuades her to accept, in Dez (the 'projectionist'), a gaze in which she will find herself His suitability for this role derives, as we shall see, from his own placement in an equivalent oedipal triangle Before this point can be reached, however, Roberta must display herself upon a stage in front of the various contending gazes, gathered together in the audience· those of Dez. Gary (her husband) and the gunman.

It is when the division of her individuality is itself turned into a spectacle (when she is sliced in two by the magician) that she recognizes the gunman and he simultaneously recognizes her ear-ring His is the most dangerous of the three contending gazes, for he sees only an object of value when he looks at her. Her gaze and his do not meet She sees him, he sees her ear-ring and tears it from her head. along with her wig This is the peril attendant on acquiring possession of the Phallus What he wants from her is something she is unaware of having (unaware, at least, of its significance). It is a thing acquired by accident in addition to the consciously desired fetish

After the gunman has fled. Dez and Gary jointly help her from this sacrificial altar of division, and the split in her identity becomes defined and limited. in the film's conclusion, to her choice between them During the height of her drama, the moment of her most acute danger, Susan is absent When they *do* meet, Susan greets her only as 'stranger' It is the two men who are concerned with

whether she is 'Roberta' or 'Susan' and it is with them that she must choose the name which will place her within the symbolic order Susan's domain (the field of maternal power) is the order of the Imaginary

At the start of the film, Susan leaves, on the sleeping body of her boyfriend, a polaroid photograph *of himself.* Like a mirror, she returns to people their images In such a transaction, however, there is an interval (between the image and its possession) through which a displacement, an error of assignment, can occur Hence Susan's photo of herself falls into the hands of Roberta, who slips under its spell The *fixing* of images, in a place which is proper to them, would be the task of a symbolic nexus By her assiduous cultivation of the externalities of style, Susan escapes the limits of this fixity Her promiscuity refuses the unitary identity which Roberta seeks in a male gaze Unlike Roberta, she can accept a state of divided identity, and live at ease with it

In the night club sequence, such division takes an extreme and curious form, for she is dancing to a record by Madonna, which is presumably not supposed to have been recorded by her character in the film 'I'm tired of dancing here all by myself / Tonight, I want to dance with someone else,' Madonna sings But she can achieve both these intentions simultaneously since she is both herself *and* someone else She has, in fact, succeeded in resolving the oedipal dilemma precisely by not solving it

Roberta, more serious and self-conscious, demands an answer to the Sphinx's riddle Unknown to her husband, she has been reading books of popular psychology – although the title of one of these, *How to be Your Own Best Friend*, contains a clue to the divisions upon which identity is founded, nevertheless the ideology expounded by these books asserts the existence of a 'genuine self' freed from those 'crazy notions' which are 'not genuine impulses' [11] Such a self-possession of identity is then held to be the basis for 'the true intimacy which is only possible between equals, between adults. [.] When people are in full possession of themselves, when they really know who they are and *are* who they are, that's when they can really open themselves to others' [12]

However, the narrative structure of *Desperately Seeking Susan* reveals that the finally achieved intimacy of Roberta and Dez is attained and sustained only by means of an intricate network of mediations which exceeds the self-possessed identity of either These mediations make use of a complex array of media, to establish connections without which passion could not have found the context in which to flare. The satisfactions of the story thus provide a geometrical disproof of the romantic[13] ideologies of popular psychology:

11 M Newman and B Berkowitz How To Be Your Own Best Friend (New York Ballantine, 1974), p 44

12 Ibid p 72

13 In the sense given to this word by Girard p 17

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              Jim        ← telephone →        Dez
               ↑                                ↑
             newspaper                       intimacy
               ads                              ↓
Roberta —sight→                          Roberta/Susan
        \      ↓
         \   Susan
          \
           \                                      ↗
            \        clothing          _____
             \       exchange
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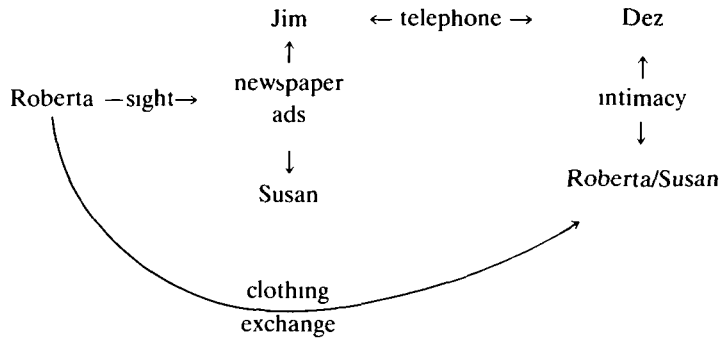
The love of Jim and Susan reduplicates itself in the Dez/Roberta
couple through the mediation of the Jim/Dez friendship The power
of this friendship is sufficient to disturb Dez in his 'projection' (his
placing of desire outside himself). When Jim rings him at work, Dez
allows the screen he is tending to become blank· the index of
jouissance This love of Dez for Jim (who is the 'mediator' in
Girard's analysis of desire) is transferred to Roberta, while he still
believes her to be Susan.

This forms the *second* of the film's oedipal triangles, sharing its
(parental) base with the first Roberta's *identification* with Susan can
thus meet with Dez's *desire* for Susan, defusing the inherent rivalry
of triadic desire (which is the focus of the narratives discussed by
Girard) If narrative is oedipal (triangular), its closure can be
effected by the formation of an amorous quadrilateral

```
     Dez        ← love →        Roberta
      ↑                            ↑
                               potential
  friendship                   friendship
      ↓                            ↓
     Jim        ← love →         Susan
```
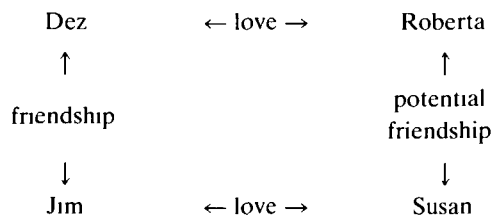
This, indeed, is directly depicted in the closing moments of the
film, with Dez and Roberta kissing in the projection booth above
Jim and Susan in the cinema, illuminated by their *jouissance* (like
parents, pleased by their children's repetition of their own
coupledom) The blank breast of a screen without stories agitates
the rest of the audience whose uncontrollable jeering is a return to
the emotive and wordless world of the infant, as if traumatized by
this rupture in representation But Jim and Susan laugh, accepting in
the form of joy these same wordless bubblings of the drives,
momentarily freed from captivation by an image

However, the fourth side of the quadrilateral, towards which the
film ineluctably tends, remains merely potential Roberta has

usurped and occupied the place of 'Susan's friend' by taking the job
of magician's assistant, whose previous occupant had the same kind
of affectionate friendship for Susan as Dez has for Jim. However,
when they finally meet, Roberta and Susan exchange merely a
phrase, and a look. And, in the film's final image they are looking
towards *us*, not at each other, as they jointly clutch their monetary
reward (that divisible destroyer of signification) The film has been
constructed not on their possible unity (as a couple) but on their
contrasting responses to the demands of identity formation

The Jim/Susan couple has remained unaffected by the events of
the narrative, which has traced its duplication through the mediation
of oedipal triangles To arrive at her place at the apex of the
concluding quadrilateral, Roberta has had to separate from her
husband and to drift, for a time, in the dangerous and unstable
world of 'magic'. The nightmare landscape inside and surrounding
the 'Magic Club', lit in a foreboding chiaroscuro, is an arena of
dream displacements in which her husband can appear (on TV) with
a foreign voice. Precariously progressing towards her oedipal
destiny, she carries in her hand two caged doves. These doubled and
winged phalluses provide the occasion for the film's funniest line.
Arrested in the mistaken belief that she is a prostitute, Roberta's
fellow prisoner asks, with mystified professional interest, 'How do
you use the birds?'.

The explosive laughter this remark can induce in an audience
indicates the profound release of repressions it simulates The
comment touches a vague apprehension of polymorphous sexuality,
where indescribable and unexplored sensations could be found: a
pre-oedipal sexuality limited neither to the human sphere nor to
unitary attachments From within the 'Glass house' (as Susan calls
it) of normality, Gary and his sister can only conceptualize this
polymorphous realm, to which they sense Roberta has descended,
under thoroughly oedipal designations of transgression They fear
she may be a 'prostitute', or even a 'lesbian' highly conventional
deviations compared with the practice of avian sexual magic

It is above and across these same caged birds that Dez and
Roberta kiss, when their diverse desires find in this coupling a
partial 'solution' to their triangulated troubles Dez pushes the birds
away, repressing polymorphous sexuality at the same moment that
he carries Roberta away from 'Chastity' (a word prominent on the
film poster behind them). Oedipalized heterosexuality is only
attained at the cost of repression and 'projection', as an investment
of sexual drives in identity and narrative Roberta's journey,
through the dream world, ends when she finds someone to project a
suitable identity upon her

Lewis Carroll's Alice underwent a similar journey, lucidly
declaring, at one moment of distress: 'I'll stay down here! It'll be no
use their putting their heads down and saying "Come up again.

14 L Carroll *Alice In Wonderland* Chapter 2

dear!" I shall only look up and say, "Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else"' [14]

Susan, whose concern and domain is image, not identity, will remain in the illuminated dark of the cinema, with neither the desire, nor the means, to leave It is to the movies that she takes her friend and it is in the movies that she lets her lover feed her popcorn, getting into the groove of fulfilled oral drives, when there are no more stories on the screen.

Reading the postmodernist image: a 'cognitive mapping'

TONY WILSON

> Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object, if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life
>
> Michael Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*[1]

1 M Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin University of Texas Press, 1981), p 292

FILM with a wide circulation in commercial cinemas and most television dramas operate, according to Colin MacCabe, 'an empirical notion of truth'[2] I take this phrase to refer to a Correspondence Theory of truth in which spoken or written statements count as true if, and only if, they correspond to reality In the classic realist text of dominant film and television this correspondence is to the flow of visual images (the text's 'metadiscourse') which, as in a detective narrative, appears to disclose how things really are In MacCabe's words, the images of this metadiscourse constitute a 'transparent' discourse in which the 'identity of things shines through'. The correspondence of speech to the image is here, therefore, simultaneously a philosophically prescribed correspondence to the world. 'In this tradition, meaning was defined as "designation", the meaning of a word was what it designates, while the primary function of language was denotative, namely to inform us about objectively existing states of affairs'[3]

2 C MacCabe 'Realism and the cinema notes on some Brechtian theses in T Bennett et al (eds), *Popular Television and Film* (London British Film Institute 1981) p 217

For the modernist philosopher of language concerned in a reflexive operation to investigate language itself, this correspondence is impossible It implies a relationship of similarity between signifier

3 S Benhabib Epistemologies of postmodernism a rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard *New German Critique* no 33 (1984), p 107

and object signified. But, insisted philosophical modernism, the discursive (spoken or written) is, quite simply, *different* from the non-discursive (reality). This difference is shown, for instance, in the impossibility of finding referents in the world for signs such as 'or' and 'this' As Wittgenstein argued, words cannot correspond to things and the attempt to think that they do produces 'mental cramp' 'That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions But one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours'.[4] In linguistic philosophy modernism works itself out in the investigation of language often separated from the political and social operations of the world

Postmodernist theorizing, of the kind discussed below, can be read as a later response to the impossibility of correspondence theory. 'One of the central objects of critique in postmodernist philosophy, therefore, is the classical theory of representation' [5] Discourse is constituted by both words and images and unlike words, images have an iconic relationship with their objects of reference Postmodernism celebrates this visual resemblance, not in a theory of correspondence, but in asserting the *identity* of signifier and signified reality It is 'a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself'.[6] This is effectively to deny a relationship of correspondence· discourse cannot correspond to the non-discursive because there is only discourse With the model or image 'a pervasive structure of the social environment'[7] reality is reduced to the *simulacrum*

The image 'bears no relation to any reality whatever it is its own pure simulacrum',[8] a copy only of itself But this is to go too far Our dialectic of theorizing about film and television should revisit this excess, correcting it, I want to suggest, with a Perspectival Theory of truth This will acknowledge both similarities and differences between referring sign and referent In the terms of this theory, statements are to be commended as true if, and only if, they succeed in describing an *aspect* of their reference, an aspect and reference marked out in the world by their sense Here, simulacra (the discursive) and their three-dimensional instantiation in worldly events and objects are held apart in a separation which allows the true/correct, the false/incorrect, and the (im)possible.

Speech and images in film or television texts relate perspectivally to the world, 'a global, social totality', as a 'cognitive map' (Jameson) As Jameson indicates, 'all forms of aesthetic production consist in one way or another in the struggle with and for representation' [9] In urging a re-reading of postmodernist readings, this article adopts his thesis that 'the autoreferentiality of much of postmodernist art' is 'a degraded figure of the great multinational space that remains to be cognitively mapped' [10] Jameson 'gives professors some reason for reading literature and a way of doing it' [11]

4 L Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford Blackwell 1978) p 3e

5 M Ryan Postmodern politics *Theory Culture and Society*, vol 5 no 2-3 (1988) p 559

6 J Baudrillard, 'Simulations *Semiotext(e)* (1983), p 4

7 V P Pecora 'Simulacral economics *Telos* no 75 (1988) p 125

8 Baudrillard 'Simulations p 11

9 F Jameson Cognitive mapping in C Nelson and L Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (London Macmillan 1988) p 348

10 *Ibid* p 356

11 B Anderson The gospel according to Jameson *Telos* 75 (1988) p 123

12 Jameson Cognitive mapping,
p 351

13 'Veridical is defined in the
Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'a
Truthful (Psych of visions etc)
coinciding with realities The
philosophical employment of the
concept most notably occurs in
the work of J L Austin Sense
and Sensibilia (Oxford Oxford
University Press 1962)

14 A Huyssen The search for
tradition avant-garde and
postmodernism in the 1970s
New German Critique no 22
(1981) p 33

Television's images seem frequently to be visually truthful, a 'perceptual barrage of immediacy' which 'in a suppression of distance' show the world.[12] Their ideal or intended audience recognizes them as a reliable testimony to the real. This experience of viewing a transparent 'window on the world' might be called television's *veridical effect*,[13] an apparent looking on at how things are I argue below that a postmodernist aesthetic can be read as an attempt to subvert this effect what is shown to the viewer is not to be considered a reality independent of the text. Here, the experience of the image is detached from acquiring a knowledge of the real. Or, alternatively, the experience of the image becomes *ipso facto* the experience of reality 'postmodernist experiments in visual perspective, narrative structure and temporal logic [   ] all attacked the dogma of mimetic referentiality' [14]

In one such experiment, the serial *Small World* (ITV, 24.1 88–28 2 88), Persse McGarrigle (Barry Lynch) travels around the world in a romantic quest His search is for the elusive Angelica Pabst (Leonie Mellinger) who perfectly exemplifies a simulacrum or model of womanhood, at least in the eyes of Persse. McGarrigle's route is prescribed by only one consideration the conferences where he hopes to find Angelica Arriving at one academic gathering, he enters the hotel elevator (regarded by Jameson as an appropriate means of travel through postmodernist 'hyperspace') As the doors of the lift open at his destination, he is immediately convinced that he has succeeded in his quest 'I search the hotel for over an hour and then, Professor MacCready, the door to the express elevator opened on the nineteenth floor and, yes, it *was*, at last, after all the moiling and the toiling and the searching, it was her.' But the visual turns out to be an unreliable and indeterminate guide to the real. The identity of the image, of what we see, is in question For it immediately transpires that the woman whom Persse encounters, the object of his delighted gaze, may not be Angelica, but her identical twin sister Lily, not the brilliant young woman academic, but a whore, 'a woman who was violated in public by a hairy man in a mask'

Here I suggest that for a postmodernist analysis, within the horizon of uncertainty and ambiguity which now characterizes Persse's experience, the woman standing before him is reduced from a three-dimensional being (Angelica) to a depthless image ('Angelica/Lily') This is a derealized simulacrum (filmic images without density) which cannot be filled out by a determinate identity 'The dreadful fact was that I had no idea whether she was Angelica lying or Lily telling the truth' For both Persse and the viewer this simulacrum, through the loss of its anchoring in substantial reality, cannot be other than a perfect copy of itself

The appearance of the ambiguous Angelica/Lily marks the point at which (not for the first time) the 'depthlessness' which

postmodernism asserts of experience enters and begins to
characterize Persse's life-world, his world of familiar beliefs and
actions. The processes of viewer identification are reversed: Persse's
looking takes on the character of the audience's, the perception of a
two-dimensional image.

This image of Angelica/Lily subverts the opposition within
patriarchal thought between virgin/whore, for it cannot be neatly
categorized as an image of either. In this respect, a feminist reaction
might be that it was not only postmodernist but progressive,
undermining reactionary attempts to formulate an essentialist
master-narrative of the feminine. In postmodernism, according to
Fraser and Nicholson, 'criticism floats free of any universalist
theoretical ground'.[15]

15 N Fraser and L Nicholson,
'Social criticism without
philosophy an encounter
between feminism and
postmodernism', *Theory, Culture
and Society*, vol 5, no 2-3,
(1988), p 375

But in *Small World* a means exists of returning reality to the
image so that 'it' becomes 'she'. There is a 'token' whereby
Angelica/Lily may take on the substance of either Angelica or Lily,
with a place in the world which might be referred to in a
Jamesonian 'cognitive map' of hyperspace. Lily: 'There's only one
way to tell the difference between us. We both have a birthmark on
the thigh like an inverted comma. Angie's is on the right thigh.
Mine's on the left.' Together they constitute the inverted commas of
pastiche: 'When we stand together naked we look like inside
quotation marks.' The birthmark not only marks the original entry
of both Angelica and Lily into the world but also functions as the
means by which the re-entry of the 'derealized' simulacrum into
material existence can take place. In the language of Lyotard's
Postmodern Condition, this experiment with criteria of the 'quoted'
and 'real' in the text of *Small World* is a 'paralogical' play on
language-game rules governing the relationship of signifier to object

16 R Rorty Habermas and Lyotard on post-modernity', *Praxis International* vol 4 no 1 (1984) p 33

17 J Baudrillard On nihilism *On the Beach* no 6 (1984) quoted in D Kellner Postmodernism as social theory some challenges and problems *Theory, Culture and Society* vol 5 no 2-3, (1988) p 247

18 M Featherstone In pursuit of the postmodern an introduction *Theory Culture and Society* vol 5 no 2-3 (1988) p 200

19 F Jameson Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism *New Left Review* no 146 (1984) p 72

signified As with the innovations prescribed for science, *Small World* is 'piling paralogy on paralogy'.[16]

For many postmodernists the viewer (rather than an individual in the text) is likely to undergo the experience of an image dissociated from the three-dimensional The American series *Moonlighting* (BBC2, Winter 1989) can replay lines from past episodes in a series of shots unconnected by narrative. This produces a disjointed compilation of phrases in a visual segmentation at the level of individual frames Here, the reference is not to the world but to the history of the text itself. 'Playing with the pieces – that is post-modern'.[17] In one episode (14 March 1989) the introductory sequence cuts within sentences to produce a particular pleasure for the intended viewer This is the pleasure of recognition available to *Moonlighting*'s regular audience, generated by the pastiche of previous texts in the series Despite the 'pastness' of these references, the electronic immediacy of television's images transforms such a 'fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents' [18]

> it's my sister's fiancé, I'm afraid he's a [cut]
> a woman [cut]
> following me, every night, on my way home from work in a
> car [cut]
> about the size of a pocket watch, place carefully between
> [cut]
> my heart and soul [cut]
> [undecipherable] McGillan [cut]
> so I need to know [cut]
> William [cut]
> won't you [cut]
> would you [cut]
> can you [cut]
> all right, I'll take the case

As an aesthetic philosophy, postmodernist theory and practice can be found. not surprisingly. within television programmes about the arts Krauss attempts an explanation of its theory in *Art of the Western World* (Channel 4, 1 April 1990)

> It's as though the world has become a kind of huge billboard, or an opaque wall, of images, that separates us as individuals from a nature that might exist *behind* that wall but which we cannot penetrate to [Pause] Somehow reality has been swallowed up by a television tube So this sort of nightmare possibility accounts for absolutely everything that's going on now.

Evoking postmodernist culture's inability to 'unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life'[19] *Arena Byrne about Byrne* (BBC2, 1 April 1988) explored the life
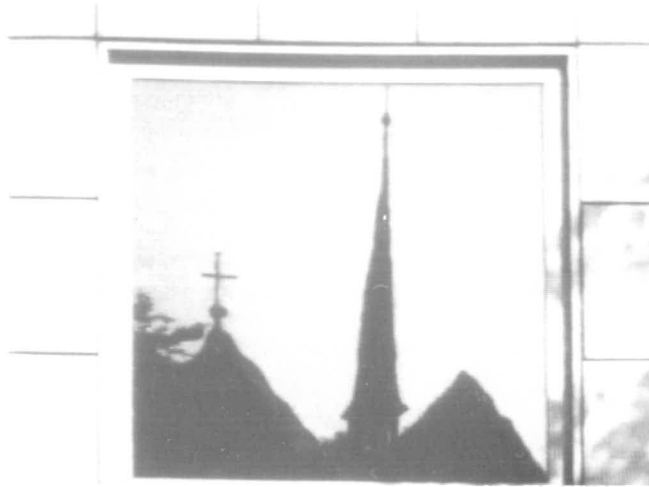
of the Scottish writer. It undermined both a sense of coherent individuality and television's representation of natural time. As the *Radio Times* indicated: 'in this diverse and inventive autobiography, Byrne travels from his youth, through his art school years to the period of his stage and TV plays, and on to his death sometime in the future. With him is Robbie Coltrane as himself and as a shamus invented by Byrne, who discovers there are as many aspects to the author as there are actors playing him.' This drama reworked the generic practices of documentary. Here, Byrne's consciousness is fractured into a display by different actors and impossible images of the future (the actor present at his death) subvert their own veridical effect.

Byrne about Byrne: generic
replay of the image (Robbie
Coltrane)

20 F Jameson 'Postmodernism and consumer society in H Foster (ed) *Postmodern Culture* (London Pluto 1983) p 118

21 M Ryan Postmodern politics *Theory, Culture and Society* vol 5, no 2-3 (1988) pp 566 562

22 C Owens, The allegorical impulse (part 2) *October* no 13, (1980) quoted in G Ulmer The object of post-criticism in H Foster (ed) *Postmodern Culture* (London Pluto 1985) p 95

23 M Ryan Postmodern politics *Theory Culture and Society* vol 5 no 2-3, (1988) p 566

24 E A Kaplan *Rocking Around the Clock* (London Methuen 1987) p 44

25 Jameson Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism p 6

From a postmodernist perspective the visual layers of a text are, then, open and indeterminate with respect to the truth or falsity of the verbal discourses which accompany them. For what is seen by the viewer has no longer a status as a transparent display of a non-discursive reality, a reality beyond the series of images which makes up the text. Cultural production 'can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent but must, as in Plato's cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls' [20] The audience has no basis on which to judge the validity of what is heard, its relationship, accurate or otherwise, to the world. Instead the flow of visual images represents only itself, its own reality as *simulacrum* 'The contemporary period is the age of simulacra, of endlessly circulating signifiers or representations that nowhere touch a reality ' Postmodernism suggests that 'capitalist economic necessity can be transcended' in a play of images which nowhere connects with the world [21]

Such a failure of the visual is a postmodernist suspension of the veridical effect To investigate the transparency of the image is modernist but to undermine its reference to reality is to engage with the aesthetics of postmodernism. For while modernism may be regarded as a detached 'scientific' (Brecht) scrutiny of the means of representation, postmodernism raises the question of the very possibility of representation itself 'Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of an image to a referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent. [.] Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference' [22]

Within the cognitive horizons of such a radical doubt directed at the veridical quality of the viewer's experience as viewer, that experience itself (paradoxically) begins to constitute the only reality with which the audience can engage In a postmodernist ontology of television and the world, 'reality' for the viewer is to be identified with a conjunction of images 'Order consists of reducing this play [of images/simulacra/representations] to a supposed reality'.[23]

Postmodernist philosophy argues that worldly phenomena are to be increasingly identified as simulacra. 'The new postmodern universe, with its celebration of the look – the surfaces, textures, the self-as-commodity – threatens to reduce everything to the image/representation/simulacrum' [24] As I noted above, this is to reject the empiricist account of truth as representation, an account resting on a dualistic separation of image and reality in which the one corresponds to the other. It is postmodernism's philosophical contribution to assert that such a separation cannot (or can no longer) be made, for with 'the object world itself – now become a set of texts or simulacra'[25] the picture itself has become reality Apparently successful in its erstwhile functions of representation, the

image is now thrown back on 'play', limited to the continual renovation of its own history in the references of pastiche.

Clearly, accepting these arguments for postmodernism is incompatible with simultaneously maintaining the possibility of identification as appropriating a subject's (character's, presenter's) account of reality mediated through the images of a text Here the modernist faith in the visual (whatever the need for its reflexive study) as a source of accurate information about an independent world is challenged and rejected The postmodernist suspicion of the image and the master-narrative of politics or scientific progress claiming universal validity is shared by the feminist. 'Postmodernist thought, on the contrary, is bound to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly partial' [26] When examined by the feminist, the apparently universal master-narrative invariably discloses representations of the world by a male subject, limiting the possibilities of identification through the narrowness or unreality of what they reveal [27]

The last programme in the series *State of the Art* (Channel 4, 15 February 1987), a 'series about the visual arts today (and their relationship with the world in which we live)' (*TV Times*), examined *inter alia* the postmodern claims of 'lostness' and radical contingency in the face of a collapsing master-narrative. Here, the sense of a worldly orientation no longer guaranteed by science is interpreted in both cultural and spatio-temporal terms Unable to judge between competing accounts of reality in favour of an absolute truth, we are equally lost within the world itself. This failure of the subject's visual and spatial orientation, a loss of the parameters of direction, must be taken as in part responsible for generating a non-representational art of pastiche A point of view which cannot be located is unable to generate an account of the world or of its whereabouts within it Thus 'the loss of our ability to *position ourselves within this space and cognitively map it*'.[28]

In the opening segment of this *State of the Art* programme, a woman is heard asking in voiceover above a sequence of images 'where am I? It seems like a nice place What's [?] special about it? Why do all these places look the same? I wonder what was here before What's missing? Does it have to be this way?' In denying a knowledge of the world, this voiceover refuses to provide a focus for the processes of identification Places look suspiciously alike, possessing the *déjà vu* quality of dreams Possibly no more than delusion, they *seem* to possess their identities and might be otherwise. Here, only Jameson's cognitive mapping offers the promise of 'disalienation', 'the practical reconquest of a sense of place' [29]

As a television series *State of the Art* was itself clearly influenced by a postmodernist aesthetic It eschewed a reading of its speech as a hierarchy of discourses in which those at the base are mistaken

26 S Aronowitz Postmodernism and politics' in A Ross (ed) *Universal Abandon The Politics of Postmodernism* (Edinburgh Edinburgh University Press 1989) p 51

27 C Owens 'The discourse of others feminists and postmodernism in H Foster (ed) *Postmodern Culture* (London Pluto 1985) p 58

28 A conversation with Fredric Jameson in Ross (ed) *Universal Abandon* p 7

29 Jameson *Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism* p 89

while those at the apex bear a relationship of correspondence to a visually articulated truth, that of simply showing reality. Instead it aimed at an undermining of verbal truth by the visual. Many of its complex artistic images could not be read as veridical, or transparent and unproblematic communications of the state of things. As its director, John Wyver, put it on *Right to Reply* (Channel 4, 14 February 1987): '[the series] doesn't have one particular line, one particular didactic, [. . .] into which [. . .] it wants to fit all the ideas and all the artists with which it tries to deal. It's not trying to do a kind of Robert Hughes type survey where his certainty is able to encompass everything that you're shown'. Instead, such visually guaranteed certainties are avoided. As Lyotard puts it in an interview at another time and place: 'there is no reason, only reasons'.[30]

The 'smooth operational surface of communication', postmodernist nonrepresentational or 'nonreflecting surfaces', are as likely to be those of everyday series and serials as much as of art television.[31] Postmodernism is both an aesthetics of mass culture and of high art for its practices 'transgress' (Lash) the opposition between the two. As Hassan remarks, it is, in McLuhan's sense 'cooler' than modernism, 'cooler, less cliquish, and far less aversive to the pop, electronic society of which it is a part'.[32]

Popular television's play and replay of the types and forms of situation comedy, soap and talk show is read as postmodernist pastiche, an exploration of the possibilities generated by the simulacra of generic variation rather than the representation of social reality. In *Trick or Treat* (ITV, 14 January 1989) the reference is to other game shows: 'we have this hand-picked audience and I'm going to be a real game show host by going "It's so nice to have

30 W Van Reijen and D Veerman, 'An interview with Jean-François Lyotard', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol 5, no. 2 3, (1988), p 278

31 J Baudrillard, 'The ecstasy of communication', in Foster (ed), *Postmodern Culture*. pp 126-7

32 I Hassan, 'The culture of postmodernism', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol 2, no. 3 (1985), p 123

Trick or Treat: Julian Clary in a 'moment of collective catharsis'

you on the show this evening. Give me your hand, it's wonderful to
see you'". Here, identification as an immediate appropriation of
perspectives on a world beyond the text and its genre is excluded.
Julian Clary's playful interviewing of the audience – his
performances as 'gender bender' – bring to mind references by Lash
to a 'deliberate ambiguity in gender and sexual preference': 'built
into images [it] problematizes reality and the normative'.[33]

This is a 'postmodern revelry in popular television's often parodic
play with form, with the notion of pleasure seemingly altogether
divorced from the realm of social relations'.[34] The pleasures of *Trick
or Treat* are those of 'the spectator's immersion'[35] in an intense
cultural experience, 'a moment of collective catharsis'.[36] As Lash
notes, they are not the Brechtian pleasures of intellectual scrutiny
which presuppose the 'distancing of the spectator from the cultural
object' appropriate to modernist drama.[37]

The pleasures of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (BBC1, 16
November – 21 December 1986) also allow the spectator's
immersion in spectacle. This is the drama of a quality television
associated with high institutional investment. Here, as Lash indicates
is the case with contemporary film, 'narrative content is increasingly
losing centrality and giving way to a more image-centred
spectacular' television.[38] Moments of heightened visual intensity in
The Singing Detective celebrate the image's ability to make
intertextual reference to other genres. Modernism may explore the
cultural preconditions for membership of a genre; postmodernism
relates genres within a syncretic intertext. While the writer Philip
Marlow (Michael Gambon) lies in his hospital bed troubled by
memories of school days, the drama cuts between segments of a
musical film noir and the songs of the St. Christopher's Hospital

33 S Lash, 'Discourse or figure? postmodernism as a "regime of signification"', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol 5, no 2–3, 1988, p 334

34 A Higson and G Vincendeau, 'Melodrama', *Screen*, vol 27, no 6, (1986), p 2

35 Lash, 'Discourse or figure?', p 314

36 R Stam, 'Mikhail Bakhtin and left cultural critique', in E A Kaplan (ed), *Postmodernism and Its Discontents*, (London: Verso, 1988), p 135

37 Lash, 'Discourse or figure?', p 313

38 *Ibid*, p 314

The Singing Detective, pastiche on soul-saving

Awakeners: 'Don't mess with Mr. In Between'. The spectator's disorientation replays the fragmentation, associated perhaps, with Potter's creative process

Television's music video programmes frequently have been foregrounded by postmodernists as texts in which their aesthetic convictions are particularly displayed Here the pleasure of spectacle is said to be on offer in a barrage of cultural impulses addressing (but not informing) the de-centred viewer, 'the multiplicity of selves in an individual's life' [39] Music videos are read as drawing on the history of popular music in ways which deny its capacity to celebrate particular historical occurrences 'postmodernists sometimes seem to be arguing that music video is not just beyond realism, but somehow outside the world of representation altogether' [40] History is reduced to an unproblematically available set of stylistic images, cultural stereotypes from the past replayable at will within contemporary music 'we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach'.[41]

Kaplan's account of postmodernist music videos is in terms of their detachment of signifier from a signified reality Through 'the abandonment of the traditional narrational devices of most popular culture' postmodernist music video undermines the confirming of an audience's visual assumptions which elsewhere produces the veridical effect, an unproblematic perception of the world [42] 'Reality' is no longer disclosed in the customary flow of images whose sequence and content generally accords with our anticipations. Characters and images do not behave as expected, to even the minimal extent that allows a story to be told But the radical edge of postmodernism's questioning of the references of a sign to mythic signifieds (for example, in sexist representation) is lost in the rapid flow of a genre of music video whose ideological position is the refusal of any political alignment at all As in architecture, so in music this 'complacent play of historical allusion and stylistic pastiche [   ] is a central feature of postmodernism more generally '[43] 'Why be political if there is no ideal to be fought over, no subject to be emancipated?'[44]

In the 'culture of the simulacrum' the textual displays and operations of television constitute the world as simulacra [45] Practical if not theoretical difficulties of getting beyond the image (generated, for instance, by satellite television) delimit the experience of reality The reduction of the world to the two-dimensional occurs as an increasingly pervasive presence 'in what Sartre would have called the *derealization* of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality [. This] loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density'.[46] For postmodern theorists, reality has dissolved into the image, there is 'no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum,

39 A Travers Shelf-life zero a classic postmodernist paper *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* no 19 (1989), p 292

40 A Goodwin Music video in the post modern world *Screen* vol 28 no 3 (1987) p 42

41 Jameson Postmodernism and consumer society p 118

42 E A Kaplan, A post-modern play of the signifier?' in P Drummond and R Paterson (eds) *Television in Transition* (London British Film Institute, 1985), pp 148, 155

43 F Jameson, 'The politics of theory ideological positions in the postmodernism debate *New German Critique* no 33 (1984) p 55

44 D Ingram Legitimacy and the postmodern condition the political thought of Jean François Lyotard *Praxis International* vol 7 no 3/4 (1987–8) p 286

45 A postmodern television of simulacra and non-representational images, at least in its refusal of an external world possesses similarities to Eco s Neo-TV (U Eco 'A guide to the neo-television of the 1980s *Framework*, no 25, (1984) p 19)

46 Jameson Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism p 76

47 T Eagleton Capitalism
modernism and postmodernism
New Left Review no 152
(1986) p 62

48 J Wyver Television and
postmodernism in
*Postmodernism ICA Documents
4* (London Institute of
Contemporary Arts 1986)
pp 52–4

49 Jameson 'Postmodernism or the
cultural logic of late capitalism'
p 66

50 A Huyssen 'The search for
tradition', p 32

51 S Hall Brave New World
Marxism Today vol 32, no 10
(1988) pp 26–7

gratuitous fiction' [47] In a postmodernist reading the veridical is dispossessed of the 'real'.

Like the postmodern image which merely displays another, television dream sequences do not contain images of an intersubjectively available world. To mark a set of images as dream-like, however, is to imply that *elsewhere* on television there are sequences which can be experienced as veridical presentations of an intersubjective reality Dream sequences may be said to be temporary experiments with the non-representational, anticipating but not instantiating the postmodern image which makes no 'pretence to be showing me, offering me sight of, the *Real* occurring elsewhere' [48]

Postmodernism is generally understood to succeed modernism as the rejection of an aesthetic analysis in which, however much the image is reflexively discussed and analysed, it continues to refer ultimately to an independent world Instead, postmodernism asserts the omnipresence of the signifier in an endless play of meaning, 'a world transformed into sheer images of itself [.] It is for such [images] that we may reserve Plato's conception of the "simulacrum" – the identical copy for which no original has ever existed'.[49] But the postmodernist aesthetic has also been read as attempting to resolve the very problem it has collaborated in generating the rational defence and support of a world view in the absence of possible appeals to 'the facts' This attempt at a solution is constituted by 'the postmodernist search for cultural tradition and continuity, which underlies all the radical rhetoric of rupture, discontinuity and epistemological breaks' [50]

2

'Theorists like Frederick Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard agree on many of the characteristics of "the post-modern condition" They remark on the dominance of image, appearance, surface-effect over depth (is Ronald Reagan a president or just a B-movie actor, real or cardboard cut-out, alive or Spitting Image?), the blurring of image and reality (is the contra war real or only happening on tv); the preference for parody, nostalgia, kitsch and pastiche over more positive modes of artistic representation (like realism or naturalism)' [51]

Postmodernism is correct in asserting the cultural centrality of the image, not least the televisual image, and the importance of understanding intertextual reference Those television images found in adverts, music videos, and drama which disclose only further television images, in a finite regress of the seen, attain a limited if not final separation from the world The short narratives of television advertising seek to influence our social relationships for these are stories in which every product is said to have 'its own truth' (*Three Minute Culture*, BBC2. 8 January 1989) To this

Three Minute Culture: Michael Ignatieff in the throw-away decade

52 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 55

53 W. Montag, 'What is at stake in the debate on postmodernism?'. in Kaplan (ed.), *Postmodernism and Its Discontents*, p. 91

54 J. L. Marsh, 'The post-modern interpretation of history: a phenomenological-hermeneutical critique', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol 19, no. 2, (1988), pp. 112–27.

55 T. Huhn, 'Jameson and Habermas', *Telos*, no. 75, (1988). p. 106

56 S. Lash, 'Discourse or figure?', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol 5, no. 2–3, p. 329

degree 'we must think of the media as if they were, in outer orbit, a sort of genetic code which controls the mutation of the real into the hyperreal'.[52]

Postmodernism's emphasis on the pluralism of reason-giving practices is valuable. It undermines the 'ruses of a totalizing reason'[53] buried within an uncritical positivistic reliance on science and technology to provide an exclusive model of rationality.[54] The human subject *is*, not an essential self, but a cognitively active socially and historically situated being continually open to change: 'subjectivity has a history – it cannot be reduced to an essentialism'.[55]

But television's narratives, or the images and models of a wider culture, cannot be identified with the three-dimensional reality of action, event and artefact which they may bring about. The social roles and prescriptions of advertising may provide 'nodal points' (Lyotard), foci of identification for the viewer: but they are distinct from the material play of identificatory practices which result.

As I have indicated, postmodernism does not operate, as in modernist theory, by calling into question the image while temporarily bracketing its function of referring. It proceeds, rather, 'through the problematization of the real', suggesting it to be artifice whose only function is as sign.[56] Postmodernism suspends the very activity of referring by 'de-differentiating' (Lash) between item signified and signifier. But, I suggest below, it is rather the case that signifier and signified co-exist as discrete items in a relationship in which one is always in excess of the other. A signifier both refers to and establishes a context of understanding and expectation in respect of its signified, an aspect of the world. That the latter may disappoint those expectations or be turned to function also as signifier does not immediately deprive it of reality, or of the

57 *Ibid*

58 Aronowitz 'Postmodernism and politics' p 54

59 Baudrillard *Simulations* pp 2 3 32

60 A Callinicos 'Postmodernism, post structuralism and post-Marxism?' *Theory Culture and Society* vol 2 no 3 (1985) p 86

61 G E Moore 'The refutation of idealism', in *Philosophical Studies* (London Kegan Paul 1922) p 30

possibility of existing under any other description than as a sign. In Lash's example of the film *Blue Velvet* 'the camera focuses on a flower, which then turns out to be made of paper mache '[57] While such a flower cannot fulfil expectations appropriate to its genuine counterpart, it is still a real object It is neither a sign nor an expression of an idea *simpliciter* its reality is such that it could have other functions in the context of different practical interests.

Images, models and signs, however 'overloaded' (Lash) semantically, are distinct from their material referents. Baudrillard, the 'funeral director of modernism',[58] would resist this separation, arguing for an identity between model and its instantiation in the world It 'is the map that engenders the territory' The real 'is a hyperreal, the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere' 'Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once'.[59] Models written into practice reproduce only themselves

But the world and its images must be held apart in critical tension In a universe the contents of which increasingly have their source in the human mind, the ideal (images, models, signs) may be a template for performance. They may be 'immanent' (Hassan) within human artefacts and activity. But the latter equally 'transcend' the former· their concrete details or activity exhibit the very indeterminacy or resistance to models and ideal types about which postmodernists express so much enthusiasm Human action is actively interpretive of pre-existing norms, rather than somehow passively determined by them

Postmodernism's neo-Idealist reduction of reality to a series of images cannot be sustained any more than an earlier attempt by philosophical Idealists to reduce the world to a set of sensations Both, to use Rorty's word, are forms of 'textualism' [60] Moore asked of Idealism, a doctrine which allowed knowledge of sensations but not of a material world, 'what reason have we for supposing that material things do *not* exist, since *their* existence has precisely the same evidence as that of our sensations?'[61] Likewise, we have the same evidence for an existing three-dimensional world as for the two-dimensional image, both can feature as the content of perception Discursive truth within a text depends (sooner or later) on a relationship to a flow of television images presenting an intersubjective world distinct from the image, a world to which individuals other than the viewer have direct perceptual and sensory access In this world, the powerful and powerless both exist The variety and play of image and signifier within communication remain inadequately explained without reference to such a reality Unless accounted for by the difference and conflict between extradiscursive interests, such discursive play can only be read as a 'multiplicity of meanings' edited at random out of the contingent 'instability of

62 Callinicos, Postmodernism post-
structuralism and post-
Marxism? p 94

63 Hassan The culture of
postmodernism p 126

language'.[62] In such a two-dimensional world the visual trickery of
Moonlighting would constitute the only appropriate object of
inquiry

Trick or Treat may have immediate reference to the 'model' of
the game show, but that model only survives in turn through its
effects on the times and spaces of experience within the television
studio. While this programme may be intended as a pastiche of
other game shows, it is inflected by the specific behaviour of
particular individuals *Trick or Treat* can be read 'perspectivally' as
a complex cognitive map of the economic and gender relations in
the public/private worlds from which the studio audience has entered
to engage in 'carnival' (Bakhtin) Postmodernist humanity may have
assumed the identity of '*Homo significans*, a creature constituting
himself, and increasingly his universe, by symbols of his own
making'.[63] But there remain the social and economic conditions of
sign-production which exist in excess of the signs themselves.

Jameson's thesis of 'cognitive mapping' suggests a route by which
postmodernism might be redeemed and its currency preserved. This
cartographic metaphor suggests an embryonic perspectival theory of
truth in which discourse is understood to relate to its subject matter
by referring to particular *aspects* of its character In television the
spoken defines a horizon of understanding the image, offering a
cognitive perspective on its content This brings into play a relay of
perspectives in which that image presents in turn a particular aspect
of the material and public world. Instead of discourse transparently
corresponding to the world as in empiricism, it picks it out
descriptively 'at an angle'. In fictional drama, at a fundamental
level, the spoken defines the seen in a particular interpretation of
the three-dimensional as containing characters not actors. Here,
particular aspects of events are retained and others forgotten (for
instance, that what takes place is *produced*). The viewer's willing
suspension of disbelief is not in the solidity of the world but in
particular descriptions of its content For the involved audience of
Dallas, a bullet-ridden JR (not Larry Hagman) 'lies in a Dallas
hospital with only his beloved Ewing Oil on his mind' (*Radio
Times*)

The relationship of a character's/presenter's spoken discourse to
the contents of the television image is *perspectival*, commenting on
only an aspect of what is seen but setting it within a broader
context His/her 'horizons of understanding' (as this visually based
metaphor suggests) are both limited by their very position as a
cognitive frame of reference and wider ranging than the particulars
at which attention is directed The verbal always asserts both more
and less than can be justified by appealing to the visual discourse to
which it corresponds 'Fundamental to twentieth-century critical
thought is the understanding that, in a signifying system such as
language, the signifier never coincides with the signified; one of

64 E Freund *The Return of the Reader* (London Methuen 1987) p 18

these elements is always, so to speak, outstripping or in excess of the other' [64]

A subject's speech 'outstrips' the visual, being always available for refutation. The truth of what is heard is always underdetermined by perceptual evidence. Apparently confirmed by what is seen, it may subsequently turn out to be false: even words spoken at the close of a text can conflict with the visual discourse of a subsequent programme. On the other hand, a particular spoken discourse is always less than the visual the latter may always be described in other ways, within alternative horizons of understanding. In this sense images transcend their description, an excess always available to be appropriated through further spoken signifiers. The visual in relation to the verbal is 'something transcendent standing in the wake of one's subjectivity' [65] Television's speech has a relevance to what is seen in terms of those aspects which, on the one hand, it emphasizes and foregrounds and, on the other, it marginalizes and about which it is silent

65 M Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul 1962) pp 325 333

Like the relationship of speech to two-dimensional image, the bearing of image on the three-dimensional world it discloses is also perspectival The image is selective in what it foregrounds or marginalizes as of less concern In the relay of perspectival understanding from the spoken to the seen, television's visual discourse catches in turn an aspect of the world What is described and shown is implicitly marked out through its similarities and differences to other worldly signifieds Here the visual is a set of two-dimensional images which discloses a perspective on the three-dimensional. But, as in the relationship between verbal and visual discourse, 'the thing and the world [ ] transcend all perspectives because this chain is temporal and incomplete'.[65]

The perspectival theory of truth 'is a picture of experience or cognition as a series of *prises* on a reality which, while it never eludes our grasp, is never fully within it either' [66] It is this perpetual absence of signifiers, this inability to linguistically grasp the world, which is explored through the loss of orientation in the visual passage from *State of the Art* discussed above

66 D Carr *Interpreting Husserl* (The Hague Nijhoff 1987) p 36

The verbal is always less than the world for the predictions of speech or writing can always be rendered false by what occurs In *Small World*. McGarrigle's confrontation at the elevator door is with a real woman but, unable to describe his perspective on this three-dimensional reality, his look cannot release the predictive knowledge upon which he might base his behaviour The visual is also less than the world, since there is always that which has not yet been shown This distance between the seen and the existing cannot be filled even by the frenetic change of image associated with postmodernist music video or *Moonlighting*'s passage through the images of past texts Reality is always in excess of the sign, waiting on an impossible containment

67 W Iser *The Act of Reading*
(Baltimore Johns Hopkins
University Press 1978) p 86

Perceptions of an object which regard it from different
perspectives foreground different aspects Within a programme, a
character's perceptions, his/her cognitive prise on reality, often
makes reference to the perspectives of others, evaluating them as
truthful or otherwise 'while each perspective offers a particular view
of the intended object, it also opens up a view on the *other*
perspectives' [67] Horizons of understanding which appear to
accurately interpret their reference support an audience's projection
of likely events within the text. In this way the discourses of
characters are 'protensive' (Husserl) or future-directed They
provide a cognitive map of likely eventualities allowing reasonable
anticipation by the viewer A character's focalization of event by
horizon of understanding may be clearly evaluative as well as
factual, drawing on discourses of morality or aesthetics in both
judgement and description

A television text, often centrally verbal in character, circulates a
series of competing horizons of understanding in terms of which its
subject matter can be interpreted and identified Here, a 'regulated
latitude of ideological positions' will, for a time, be available for
appropriation and identification by a varied audience [68] Different
ideological readings of events emerge, constituting opposing
identities for the real by marginalizing or foregrounding different
aspects of what is seen As Barthes writes, in the anchoring of an
image by the verbal the 'anchorage may be ideological and indeed
this is its principal function, the text directs the reader through the
signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive
others '[69] Occasionally this ideological anchoring may constitute a
point of rupture, sitting uneasily within a flow of hegemonic sense.

68 M White Ideological analysis
and television' in R C Allen
(ed) *Channels of Discourse*
(London Methuen 1987), p 160

69 R Barthes *Image Music Text*
(London Fontana, 1977) p 40

Horizons of understanding vary in their specificity Television's
speech relates perspectivally to the world at different levels It
serves to interpret the viewer's immediate experience of looking
But within the aesthetics of cognitive mapping, the spoken can be
read as a map relating the viewer's experience to the social relations
and practices in the world beyond the text What is seen is
unavoidably described by subjects or presenters as instances of types
which, if the text is to make sense, occur in the lifeworld of the
intended audience This is a cognitive projection from programme to
the extra-textual which spans the 'gap between phenomenological
perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking' [70] In
this way television's speech is a discourse of attempted coordination,
providing an apparent harmony open to the destabilizing influence
of political enquiry

70 Jameson Cognitive mapping'
p 353

Different cognitive horizons of understanding ascribe different
identities to a publicly available world These are open to revision in
the face of the 'facts': 'empirical concepts are changed by the
continual admission of new attributes' [71] Identities often appear to
rest more securely in 'factual' texts where the status of a voiceover

71 E Husserl *Experience and
Judgment* (London Routledge
and Kegan Paul 1973) p 333

is that of a privileged discourse of truth defining the nature of what is seen Within the hierarchy of the text's 'knowledges' the voiceover articulates a cognitive perspective with which the intended viewer is to identify In many television current affairs programmes it is reserved for the voice of the media institution itself

In the perspectival relationship between the verbal and the visual by which truth is (at least temporarily) determined, competing interpretations of a single event draw on and emphasize different aspects of its character A text's horizons of understanding are cognitive frameworks through which events are focalized But here, as media studies is aware, the horizons of understanding brought to a text by its reader may foreground other aspects of its content from those marked out within the cognitive frameworks employed by the text itself. Indeed, in the 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer) constituting understanding, a text's discursively established perspectives are always inflected in individual ways by individual readers

Roseanne: unruly woman as domestic goddess

KATHLEEN K. ROWE

Sometime after I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, all the little babies were sleeping soundly in the nursery except for me, who would scream at the top of my lungs, trying to shove my whole fist into my mouth, wearing all the skin off on the end of my nose. I was put in a tiny restraining jacket . . My mother is fond of this story because to her it illustrates what she regards as my gargantuan appetites and excess anger I think I was probably just bored

Roseanne: My Life As A Woman[1]

1 Roseanne Barr *Roseanne My Life as a Woman* (New York Harper and Row, 1989) p 3

2 The phrase slouching towards stardom is Jeremy Butler s

QUESTIONS about television celebrities often centre on a comparison with cinematic stars – on whether television turns celebrities into what various critics have called 'degenerate symbols' who are 'slouching toward stardom' and engaging in 'dialogues of the living dead'.[2] This article examines Roseanne Barr, a television celebrity who has not only slouched but whined, wisecracked, munched, mooned and sprawled her way to a curious and contradictory status in our culture explained only partially by the concept of stardom, either televisual or cinematic. Indeed, the metaphor of decay such critics invoke, while consistent with a strain of the grotesque associated with Barr, seems inappropriate to her equally compelling vitality and *jouissance* In this paper, I shall be using the name 'Roseanne' to refer to Roseanne Barr-as-sign, a person we know only through her various roles and performances in the popular discourse My use follows Barr's lead in effacing the lines among her roles Her show, after all, bears her name and in interviews she describes her 'act' as 'who she is'

Nearing the end of its second season, her sitcom securely replaced *The Cosby Show* at the top of the ratings The readers of *People Weekly* identified her as their favorite female television star and she took similar prizes in the People's Choice award show this spring. Yet 'Roseanne', both person and show, has been snubbed by the Emmies, condescended to by media critics and trashed by the tabloids (never mind the establishment press) Consider *Esquire*'s solution of how to contain Roseanne In an issue on its favorite (and least favorite) women, it ran two stories by two men, side by side – one called 'Roseanne – Yay', the other 'Roseanne – Nay' And consider this from *Star* **'Roseanne's shotgun "wedding from hell"** – 'Dad refuses to give pregnant bride away – "Don't wed that druggie bum!" '; 'Maids of honor are lesbians – best man is groom's detox pal'; 'Ex-hubby makes last-ditch bid to block ceremony', 'Rosie and Tom wolf two out of three tiers of wedding cake'. (6 Feb 1990) Granted that tabloids are *about* excess, there's often an edge of cruelty to that excess in Roseanne's case, and an effort to wrest her definition of herself from the comic to the melodramatic

Such ambivalence is the product of several phenomena Richard Dyer might explain it in terms of the ideological contradictions Roseanne plays upon – how, for example, the body of Roseanne-as-star magically reconciles the conflict women experience in a society that says 'consume' but look as if you don't. Janet Woollacott might discuss the clash of discourses inherent in situation comedy – how our pleasure in Roseanne's show arises not so much from narrative suspense about her actions as hero, nor from her one-liners, but from the economy or wit by which the show brings together two discourses on family life one based on traditional liberalism and the other on feminism and social class Patricia Mellencamp might apply Freud's analysis of wit to Roseanne as she did to Lucille Ball and Gracie Allen, suggesting that Roseanne ventures farther than her comic foremothers into the masculine terrain of the tendentious joke [3]

All of these explanations would be apt, but none would fully explain the ambivalence surrounding Roseanne Such an explanation demands a closer look at gender and at the historical representations of female figures similar to Roseanne. These figures, I believe, can be found in the tradition of the 'unruly woman', a *topos* of female outrageousness and transgression from literary and social history. Roseanne uses a 'semiotics of the unruly' to expose the gap she sees between the ideals of the New Left and the Women's Movement of the late 60s and early 70s on the one hand, and the realities of working class family life two decades later on the other.

Because female unruliness carries a strongly ambivalent charge, Roseanne's use of it both intensifies and undermines her popularity Perhaps her greatest unruliness lies in the presentation of herself as *author* rather than actor and, indeed, as author of a self over which

3 Janet Woollacott, Fictions and ideologies the case of the situation comedy in Tony Bennett Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Philadelphia Open University Press 1986) pp 196–218, Patricia Mellencamp Situation comedy feminism and Freud in Tania Modleski (ed) *Studies in Entertainment* (Bloomington Indiana University Press 1986) pp 80–95

she claims control. Her insistence on her 'authority' to create and control the meaning of *Roseanne* is an unruly act *par excellence*, triggering derision or dismissal much like Jane Fonda's earlier attempts to 'write' her self (but in the genre of melodrama rather than comedy). I will explain this in three parts. the first takes a brief look at the tradition of the unruly woman; the second, at the unruly qualities of *excess* and *looseness* Roseanne embodies, and the third, at an episode of her sitcom which dramatizes the conflict between female unruliness and the ideology of 'true womanhood'

The unruly woman

The unruly woman is often associated with sexual inversion – 'the woman on top', according to social historian Nathalie Zemon Davis, who fifteen years ago first identified her in her book *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* The sexual inversion she represents, Davis writes, is less about gender confusion than about larger issues of social and political order that come into play when what belongs 'below' (either women themselves, or their images appropriated by men in drag) usurps the position of what belongs 'above' This *topos* isn't limited to Early Modern Europe, but reverberates whenever women, especially women's bodies, are considered excessive – too fat, too mouthy, too old, too dirty, too pregnant, too sexual (or not sexual enough) for the norms of conventional gender representation. For women, excessive fatness carries associations with excessive wilfulness and excessive speech ('fat texts', as Patricia Parker explains in *Literary Fat Ladies*, a study of rhetoric, gender and property that traces literary examples of this connection from the Old Testament to the Twentieth Century).[4] Through body and speech, the unruly woman violates the unspoken feminine sanction against 'making a spectacle' of herself I see the unruly woman as prototype of woman as subject – transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire

The unruly woman is multivalent, her social power unclear. She has reinforced traditional structures, as Natalie Davis acknowledges.[5] But she has also helped sanction political disobedience for men and women alike by making such disobedience thinkable She can signify the radical utopianism of undoing all hierarchy She can also signify pollution (dirt or 'matter out of place', as Mary Douglas might explain). As such she becomes a source of danger for threatening the conceptual categories which organize our lives. For these reasons – for the power she derives from her liminality, her associations with boundaries and taboo – she evokes not only delight but disgust and fear Her ambivalence, which is the source of her oppositional power, is usually contained

4 Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies Rhetoric Gender Property* (New York Methuen, 1987)

5 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford Stanford University Press 1975) pp 124–51

within the licence accorded to the comic and the carnivalesque But not always.

The unruly woman has gossiped and cackled in the margins of history for millenia, from Sarah of the Old Testament who laughed at God (and figures in Roseanne's tribute to her grandmother in her autobiography), to the obstinate and garrulous Mrs Noah of the medieval Miracle Plays (who would not board the Ark until she was good and ready), to the folk figure 'Mère Folle' and the subject of Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*. Her more recent incarnations include such figures as the screwball heroine of the 1930s film, Miss Piggy, and a pantheon of current female grotesques and sacred monsters Tammy Faye Bakker, Leona Helmsley, Imelda Marcos and Zsa Zsa Gabor The media discourse around these women reveals the same mixed bag of emotions I see attached to Roseanne, the same cruelty and tendency to carnivalize by pushing them into parodies of melodrama, a genre which, unlike much comedy, punishes the unruly woman for asserting her desire Such parodies of melodrama make the unruly woman the target of *our* laughter, while denying her the power and pleasure of her own

The disruptive power of these women – carnivalesque and carnivalized – contains much potential for feminist appropriation Such an appropriation could enable us to problematize two areas critical to feminist theories of spectatorship and the subject· the social and cultural norms of femininity, and our understanding of how we are constructed as gendered subjects in the language of spectacle and the visual In her essay 'Female Grotesques', Mary Russo asks: 'In what sense can women really produce or make spectacles out of themselves?   The figure of female transgressor as public spectacle is still powerfully resonant, and the possibilities of redeploying this representation as a demystifying or utopian model have not been exhausted'.[6] She suggests that the parodic excesses of the unruly woman and the comic conventions surrounding her provide a space to act out the dilemmas of femininity, to *make visible* and *laughable* what Mary Ann Doane describes as the 'tropes of femininity'

Such a sense of spectacle differs from Laura Mulvey's It accepts the relation between power and visual pleasure but argues for an understanding of that relation as more historically determined, its terms more mutable More Foucaldian than Freudian, it suggests that visual power flows in multiple directions and that the position of spectacle isn't entirely one of weakness. Because public power is predicated largely on visibility, men have traditionally understood the need to secure their power not only by looking but by being seen – or rather, by fashioning, as author, a spectacle of themselves Already bound in a web of visual power, women might begin to renegotiate its terms Such a move would be similar to what Teresa de Lauretis advocates when she calls for the strategic use of

7 Teresa de Lauretis *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington Indiana University Press 1987), p 109

narrative to 'construct 'other forms of coherence, to shift the terms of representation, to produce the conditions of representability of another – and gendered – social subject'.[7] By returning the male gaze, we might expose (make a spectacle of) the gazer. And by utilizing the power already invested in us as image, we might begin to negate our own 'invisibility' in the public sphere.

Roseanne as spectacle

The spectacle Roseanne creates is *for* herself, produced *by* herself from a consciously developed perspective on ethnicity, gender and social class This spectacle derives much of its power from her construction of it as her 'self' – an entity which, in turn, she has knowingly fashioned through interviews, public performances and perhaps most unambiguously her autobiography. This book, by its very existence, enhances the potency of Roseanne-as-sign because it grants a historicity to her 'self' and a materiality to her claims for authorship The autobiography describes key moments in the development of 'Roseanne' – how she learned about female strength when for the first time in her life she saw a woman (her grandmother) stand up to a man, her father; how she learned about marginality and fear from her childhood as a Jew in Utah under the shadow of the Holocaust, and from her own experience of madness and institutionalization Madness is a leitmotif both in her autobiography and in the tabloid talk about her [8] Roseanne's eventual discovery of feminism and counter-culture politics led to disillusionment when the women's movement was taken over by women unlike her, 'handpicked', she writes, to be acceptable to the establishment

8 For example 'Roseanne goes nuts' in the *Enquirer* 9 April 1989 and My insane year in *People Weekly* 9 October 1989 pp 85–6 Like other labels of deviancy, madness is often attached to the unruly woman

Co-existing with the pain of her childhood and early adulthood was a love of laughter, the bizarre, a good joke She always wanted to be a writer, not an actor Performance, however, was the only 'place' where she felt safe And because, since her childhood, she could always say what she wanted to as long as it was funny, *comic* performance allowed her to be a writer, to 'write' herself While her decision to be a comedian was hampered by a difficulty in finding a female tradition in which to locate her own voice, she discovered her stance (or 'attitude') when she realized that she could take up the issue of female oppression by adopting its language Helen Andelin's *Fascinating Womanhood* (1974) was one of the most popular manuals of femininity for the women of her mother's generation It taught women to manipulate men by becoming 'domestic goddesses' Yet, Roseanne discovered, such terms might also be used for 'self-definition, rebellion, truth-telling', for telling a truth that in her case is both ironic and affirmative And so she built her act and her success on an exposure of the 'tropes of femininity'

(the ideology of 'true womanhood', the perfect wife and mother) by cultivating the opposite (an image of the unruly woman)

Roseanne's disruptiveness is more clearly paradigmatic than syntagmatic, less visible in the stories her series dramatizes than in the image cultivated around her body Roseanne-the-person who tattooed her buttocks and mooned her fans, Roseanne-the-character for whom farting and nose-picking are as much a reality as dirty dishes and obnoxious boy bosses Both in body and speech, Roseanne is defined by *excess* and by *looseness* – qualities that mark her in opposition to bourgeois and feminine standards of decorum

Of all of Roseanne's excesses, none seems more potent than her weight. Indeed, the very appearance of a 200-plus-pound woman in a weekly prime-time sitcom is significant in itself. Her body epitomizes the grotesque body of Bakhtin, the body which exaggerates its processes, its bulges and orifices, rather than concealing them as the monumental, static 'classical' or 'bourgeois' body does Implicit in Bakhtin's analysis is the privileging of the female body – above all the *maternal* body which, through pregnancy and childbirth, participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of inside-out and outside-in, death-in-life and life-in-death Roseanne's affinity with the grotesque body is evident in the first paragraph of *Roseanne My Life as a Woman*, where her description of her 'gargantuan appetites' even as a newborn brings to mind Bakhtin's study of Rabelais [9] Roseanne compounds her fatness with a 'looseness' of body language and speech – she sprawls, slouches, flops on furniture Her speech – even apart from its content – is loose (in its 'sloppy' enunciation and grammar) and excessive (in tone and volume) She laughs loudly, screams shrilly and speaks in a nasal whine

In our culture, both fatness and looseness are violations of codes of feminine posture and behavior. Women of 'ill-repute' are described as loose, their bodies, especially their sexuality, seen as out of control. Fatness, of course, is an especially significant issue for women, and perhaps patriarchy nowhere inscribes itself more insidiously and viciously on female bodies than in the cult of thinness Fat females are stigmatized as unfeminine, rebellious and sexually deviant (under or over-sexed) Women who are too fat or move too loosely appropriate too much space, and femininity is gauged by how little space women take up [10] It is also gauged by the intrusiveness of women's utterances As Henley notes, voices in any culture that are not meant to be heard are perceived as loud when they do speak, regardless of their decibel level ('shrill' feminists, for example) Farting, belching and nose-picking likewise betray a failure to restrain the body Such 'extreme looseness of body-focused functions' is generally not available to women as an avenue of revolt but, as Nancy Henley suggests, 'if it should ever come into women's repertoire, it will carry great power' [11]

9 Mikhail Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World* trans Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington Indiana University Press 1984)

10 Nancy M Henley *Body Politics Power Sex and Non-verbal Communication* (Englewood Cliffs Prentice Hall 1977) p 38

11 *Ibid*, p 91

12 In What am I anyway a Zoo?
New York Times 31 July 1989,
she enumerates the ways people
have interpreted what she
stands for – the regular
housewife, the mother the
postfeminist the Little Guy fat
people the Queen of Tabloid
America the body politic sex
angry womankind herself the
notorious and sensationalistic La
Luna madness of an ovulating
Abzugienne woman run wild etc

13 Roseanne, p 51

14 People Weekly pp 85-6

15 Pierre Bourdieu Distinction a
Social Critique of the Judgement
of Taste trans Richard Nice
(Cambridge Harvard University
Press 1984) p 208

Expanding that repertoire is entirely consistent with Roseanne's professed mission.[12] She writes of wanting 'to break every social norm . . . and see that it is laughed at I chuckle with glee if I know I have offended someone, because the people I intend to insult offend me horribly'[13] In an interview in *People Weekly*, Roseanne describes how Matt Williams, a former producer on her show, tried to get her fired: 'He compiled a list of every offensive thing I did. And I do offensive things . . . *That's who I am. That's my act* So Matt was in his office making a list of how gross I was, how many times I farted and belched – taking it to the network to show I was out of control' (my emphasis). Of course she was out of control – *his* control He wanted to base the show on castration jokes, she says, recasting it from the point of view of the little boy. She wanted something else – something different from what she sees as the norm of television a 'male point of view coming out of women's mouths . particularly around families'[14]

Roseanne's ease with her body, signified by her looseness, triggers much of the *unease* surrounding her Such ease reveals what Pierre Bourdieu describes as 'a sort of indifference to the objectifying gaze of others which neutralizes its powers' and 'appropriates its appropriation'[15] It marks Roseanne's rebellion against not only the codes of gender but of class, for ease with one's body is the prerogative of the upper classes For the working classes, the body is more likely to be a source of embarrassment, timidity and alienation, because the norms of the 'legitimate' body – beauty, fitness, and so on – are accepted across class boundaries while the ability to achieve them is not In a culture which defines nature negatively as 'sloppiness', physical beauty bears value that is not only aesthetic but moral, reinforcing a sense of superiority in those who put some effort into enhancing their 'natural' beauty (p 206)

Roseanne's indifference to conventional readings of her body exposes the ideology underlying those readings. Concerning her fatness, she resists the culture's efforts to define and judge her by her weight. Publicly celebrating the libidinal pleasure of food, she argues that women need to take up more space in the world, not less. And her comments about menstruation similarly attack the 'legitimate' female body, which does not menstruate in public On an award show she announced that she had 'cramps that could kill a horse' She startled Oprah Winfrey on her talk show by describing the special pleasure she took from the fact that she and her sister were 'on their period' – unclean, according to Orthodox law – when they were allowed to bear their grandmother's coffin And in her autobiography she writes about putting a woman (her) in the White House: 'My campaign motto will be "Let's vote for Rosie and put some new blood in the White House – every 28 days"' (p 117) Rather than accepting the barrage of ads that tell women they can never be young, thin or beautiful enough and that their houses – an

extension of their bodies – can never be immaculate enough, she rejects the 'pollution taboos' that foster silence, shame and self-hatred in women by urging them to keep their genitals, like their kitchen appliances, deodorized, anticepticized and 'April fresh'. Instead she reveals the social causes of female fatness, irritability and messiness in the strains of working class family life, where junk food late at night may be a sensible choice for comfort after a day punching out plastic forks on an assembly line.

Demonic desires

Roseanne sleepwalks to her long-awaited bath.

Flanked by the 'pec twins' and in a glamorous hairdo and robe, Roseanne flaunts her new power.

The episode I'm going to talk about (7 November 1989) is in some ways atypical because of its stylistic excess and reflexivity. Yet I've chosen it because it so clearly defines female unruliness and its opposite, the ideology of the self-sacrificing wife and mother. It does so by drawing on and juxtaposing three styles: a realist sitcom style for the arena of ideology in the world of the working class wife and mother; a surreal dream sequence for female unruliness; and a musical sequence within the dream to reconcile the 'real' with the unruly. Dream sequences invariably signal the eruption of unconscious desire. In this episode, the dream is linked clearly with the eruption of *female* desire, the defining mark of the unruly woman.

The episode begins as the show does every week, in the normal world of broken plumbing, incessant demands, job troubles. Roseanne wants ten minutes alone in a hot bath after what she describes as 'the worst week in her life' (she just quit her job at the Wellman factory). But between her husband Dan and her kids, she can't get into the bathroom. She falls asleep while she's waiting. At this point all the marks of the sitcom disappear. The music and

Roseanne finds that she's not safe from her family's demands even in her dreams.

Roseanne takes aim at her son D.J. before zapping him with a replica of his own toy ray gun.

The pec twins prepare to boil husband Dan in a pot of creamed corn.

Officer Jackie marches her sister Roseanne off to the People's Courts for 'murdering' her family.

Crystal, the perfect lady, testifies against Roseanne and praises Dan's sweaty masculine allure.

lighting signal 'dream'. Roseanne walks into her bathroom, but it's been transformed into an opulent, Romanesque pleasure spa where she is pampered by two bare-chested male attendants ('the pec twins', as Dan later calls them). She's become a glamorous redhead.

Even within this dream, however, she's haunted by her family and the institution that stands most firmly behind it – the law. One by one, her family appears and continues to nag her for attention and interfere with her bath. And one by one, without hesitation, she kills them off with tidy and appropriate means. (In one instance, she twitches her nose before working her magic, alluding to the unruly women of the late 60s/early 70s sitcom *Bewitched*). Revenge and revenge fantasies are of course a staple in the feminist imagination (Marleen Gorris's *A Question of Silence* (1982), Nelly Kaplan's *A Very Curious Girl* (1969), Cecilia Condit's *Possibly in Michigan* (1985), Karen Arthur's *Lady Beware* (1987)). In this case, however, Roseanne doesn't murder for revenge but for a bath.

Roseanne's unruliness is further challenged, ideology reasserts itself and the dream threatens to become a nightmare when she is arrested for murder and brought to court. Her family really *isn't* dead, and with her friends they testify against her, implying that because of her shortcomings as a wife and mother she's been murdering them all along. Her friend Crystal says: 'She's loud, she's bossy, she talks with her mouth full. She feeds her kids frozen fish sticks and high calorie sodas. She doesn't have proper grooming habits'. And she doesn't treat her husband right even though, as Roseanne explains, 'The only way to keep a man happy is to treat him like dirt once in a while'. The trial, like the dream itself, dramatizes a struggle over interpretation of the frame story that

preceded it: the court judges her desire for the bath as narcissistic and hedonistic, and her barely suppressed frustration as murderous. Such desires are taboo for good self-sacrificing mothers. For Roseanne, the bath (and the 'murders' it *requires*) are quite pleasurable for reasons both sensuous and righteous. Everyone gets what they deserve. Coincidentally, ABC was running ads during this episode for the docudrama *Small Sacrifices* (12–14 November 1989), about a real mother, Diane Downs, who murdered one of her children.

Barely into the trial, it becomes apparent that Roseanne severely strains the court's power to impose its order on her. The rigid oppositions it tries to enforce begin to blur, and alliances shift. Roseanne defends her kids when the judge – Judge Wapner from *People's Court* – yells at them. Roseanne, defended by her sister, turns the tables on the kids and they repent for the pain they've caused her. With Dan's abrupt change from prosecutor to crooner and character witness, the courtroom becomes the stage for a musical. He breaks into song, and soon the judge, jury and entire cast are dancing and singing Roseanne's praises in a bizarre production number. Female desire *isn't* monstrous; acting on it 'ain't misbehavin'', her friend Vanda sings. This celebration of Roseanne in effect vindicates her, although the judge remains unconvinced, finding her not only guilty but in contempt of court. Dreamwork done, she awakens, the sound of the judge's gavel becoming Dan's hammer on the plumbing. Dan's job is over too, but the kids still want her attention. Dan jokes that there's no place like home but Roseanne answers 'Bull'. On her way, at last, to her bath, she closes the door to the bathroom to the strains of the chorus singing 'We Love Roseanne'.

'Sing? I can't sing.'

'We love Roseanne.'

Roseanne basks in adoration, the star of the show.

The courtroom becomes the stage for a musical production number that vindicates Roseanne.

The plumbing now fixed,
Roseanne's dream comes to an
end.

'Oh no, you're alive.'

The requirements for bringing this fantasy to an end are important. First, what ultimately satisfies Roseanne isn't an escape from her family but an acknowledgment from them of *her* needs and an expression of their feeling for her – 'We love you, Roseanne'. I am not suggesting that Roseanne's series miraculously transcends the limitations of primetime television. To a certain degree this ending does represent a sentimental co-opting of her power, a shift from the potentially radical to the liberal. But it also indicates a refusal to flatten contradictions. Much of Roseanne's appeal lies in the delicate balance she maintains between individual and institution and in the impersonal nature of her anger and humour, which are targeted not so much at the people she lives with as at what makes them the way they are. What Roseanne *really* murders here is the ideology of 'perfect wife and mother' which she reveals to be murderous in itself.

The structuring – and limits – of Roseanne's vindication are also important. Although the law is made ludicrous, it retains its power and remains ultimately indifferent and immovable. Roseanne's 'contempt' seems her greatest crime. More important, whatever vindication Roseanne does enjoy can happen only within a dream. It cannot be sustained in real life. The realism of the frame story inevitably reasserts itself. And even within the dream, the reconciliation between unruly fantasy and ideology can be brought about only deploying the heavy artillery of the musical and its conventions. As Rick Altman has shown, few forms embody the utopian impulse of popular culture more insistently than the musical, and within musicals, contradictions difficult to resolve otherwise are acted out in production numbers. That is what happens here. The production number gives a fleeting resolution to the problem Roseanne typically plays with: representing the unrepresentable. A fat woman who is also sexual; a sloppy housewife who's a good mother; a 'loose' woman who is also tidy, who hates matrimony but loves her husband, who hates the ideology of 'true womanhood' yet considers herself a domestic goddess.

There is much more to be said about Roseanne and the unruly woman: about her fights to maintain authorial control over (and credit for) her show; her use of the grotesque in the film *She Devil* (1989); her performance as a standup comic; the nature of her humour, which she calls 'funny womanness'; her identity as a Jew and the suppression of ethnicity in her series; the series' move toward melodrama and its treatment of social class. A more sweeping look at the unruly woman would find much of interest in the Hollywood screwball comedy as well as feminist avant-garde film and video. It would take up questions about the relation between gender, anger and Medusan laughter – about the links Hélène Cixous establishes between laughing, writing and the body and their implications for theories of female spectatorship. And while this

article has emphasized the oppositional potential of female unruliness, it is equally important to expose its misogynistic uses, as in, for example, the Fox sitcom *Married .   With Children* (1988) Unlike Roseanne, who uses female unruliness to push at the limits of acceptable female behavior. Peg inhabits the unruly woman stereotype with little distance, embodying the 'male point of view' Roseanne sees in so much television about family

Roseanne points to alternatives Just as 'domestic goddess' can become a term of self-definition and rebellion, so can spectacle-making – when used to seize the visibility that is, after all, a precondition for existence in the public sphere The ambivalence I've tried to explain regarding Roseanne is evoked above all, perhaps. because she demonstrates how the enormous apparatus of televisual star-making can be put to such a use

reports and debates

Britain's Channel Five: at the limits of the spectrum?

TONY PEARSON

1 *Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC (Peacock Report)* HMSO Cmnd 9824, July 1986

2 *Peacock Report* para 710

3 The Future of Broadcasting, *Third Report of the Home Affairs Committee* Session 1987-8 June 1988

4 *Broadcasting in the 90s Competition Choice and Quality The Government s Plans for Broadcasting Legislation* HMSO Cm 517 November 1988 (hereinafter referred to as WP)

5 At the time of writing (July 1990) the Government s Broadcasting Bill (50/3 December 1989) was completing its House of Lords Committee Stage with the Royal Assent anticipated (after referral back to the Commons) early in the 1990/91 Parliamentary session

6 WP para 6 7

EVER since the Peacock Committee was asked to report on the future financing of the BBC, it has been clear that the Thatcher Government's strategy on broadcasting presents a challenge to the status quo The Committee's Report[1] was not accepted by the Government in its entirety, despite Peacock's provocative claim that the recommendations were designed to form part of a coherent strategy, to be taken all of a piece if the 'whole thrust' were not to be destroyed [2] Nevertheless, the Report introduced into the broadcasting lexicon an incisive vocabulary which was to prove influential and resilient Concepts like 'consumer sovereignty', 'multiplicity of choice', 'competitive tender', 'full broadcasting market' have resonated with accumulating polyphony through subsequent documentation and debate the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report of June 1988[3]. the Government's White Paper of November 1988,[4] the various versions of the Broadcasting Bill (first introduced in December 1989) culminating in the 1990 Act itself [5] The ideology implied by these terms has become the new foundation of British broadcasting policy. The Independent Television Commission (ITC), the new 'light touch' licensing body, will henceforth have the leading role in the commercial television sector.[6] Shorn of the Independent Broadcasting Authority's distinctly public service obligations as an 'authority', the ITC faces not only the protracted and delicate task of supervising the transition from the existing ITV network structure to the new nationwide system for Channel Three (C3), it will also have to take crucial decisions with regard to the proposed addition to terrestrial television broadcasting, Channel Five (C5).

7 WP paras 1 3 and 6 21

8 See Channel Five – the wild card
   in Competition Choice and
   Quality Footing the Bill Royal
   Television Society Cambridge
   Convention Report 1989, pp
   23–33 (hereinafter referred to as
   RTS Report)
9 See Wilf Stevenson and Richard
   Paterson, Time for fine tuning',
   The Listener 21 June 1990, p
   23

10 Report of the Committee on the
   Future of Broadcasting (Annan
   Report) HMSO Cmnd 6753
   1977
11 Report of the Committee on
   Broadcasting 1960 (Pilkington
   Report) HMSO Cmnd 1753
   1962

Almost six years separate the appointment of Peacock from the Broadcasting Act's Royal Assent and in that time there has been plenty of public discussion about the allocation of licences by competitive tender and the so-called quality threshold There has been plenty of public discussion, too, about the BBC's financial structure, Channel Four's special remit, cable and satellite's future, broadcasting standards and radio re-regulation There has been minimal discussion of the questions raised by the proposal for C5: What will it look like? Who will provide it? How will it be financed? What is its potential audience? Where can it be received? And, most poignant of all, is it really necessary? In fact, the C5 issue is a relative novelty, having effectively been on the table only since its mention in the 1988 White Paper.[7] It is as if discussion of the nation's fifth, and almost certainly final, terrestrial TV resource is somehow unimportant because of its coincidence with the moment of lift-off for genuinely multi-channel TV This article attempts to unravel the major considerations at stake in the 'missing' C5 debate In doing so, it draws heavily on the two major opportunities thus far for public deliberation: the Royal Television Society's (RTS) Cambridge Convention in September 1989[8] and the two-day national conference 'What's This Channel Five?', held in Sheffield in May 1990 and sponsored by Sheffield City Council, the British Film Institute, *Broadcast* magazine and *The Listener*.[9]

The Channel Five debate

Two years in which to debate a commercially and culturally significant extension to the nation's broadcast television horizons is not, as British broadcasting inquisitions go, a very long time. The impetus for a commercial competitor to the BBC, for example, was there virtually from the beginning, while both BBC and ITV made cases for a second service long before the Pilkington Committee was called upon to adjudicate between them, in the early sixties. Successive Governments have tended to proceed slowly with broadcasting reform, undertaking the widest possible consultation and weighing all the options before determining who should have responsibility for precious new frequencies The current debate about the Thatcher Government's proposals for C5 has, then, been marked by its brevity.

The long debate surrounding the genesis of the *fourth* channel is the most telling comparison It can be traced back beyond the Annan Report[10] – which was explicitly enjoined to make recommendations concerning a fourth channel – to the earlier Pilkington Report[11] which appeared exactly twenty years before Channel Four arrived. Once Pilkington's recommendation for the third channel made BBC2. and not ITV2. the reality. it became

clear that surviving aspirations for a second commercial service,
whether of a competitive or complementary character, would be
projected wholesale on to a campaign for a fourth terrestrial
channel Thus, the most recent addition to the nation's TV ecology
was two decades in the making. There are a whole array of reasons
– political, technical and financial – for what, with hindsight, seems
like an unconscionable delay But Channel Four was the successful
product of a complex organic process The political task was to get
the right structure for an innovative institution with a distinctive
remit, C4 was not simply a commercial structure aimed at
maximizing revenue for the Exchequer and removing the advertising
monopoly

By contrast C5 has been an issue for only two years and the
debate is already near its conclusion. Although nobody would argue
for another twenty year gestation period, anxieties persist about the
lack of informed discussion that will be possible before the
stewardship of the channel is decided The idea of a fifth channel,
after all, seems to have been absent from the political agenda until a
Lords Written Answer on 28 July 1988 belatedly paved the way for

12 WP, para 5 6

its brief inclusion in the White Paper the following November [12]
Suddenly, it was as if the hallowed arguments about spectrum
scarcity and universality were no longer relevant, a C5 network
covering 65–70 per cent of the population could be made available
at Ultra High Frequency (UHF) from the beginning of 1993 (and
the Government simultaneously announced its contemplation of a
sixth network, subject to technical feasibility). The legislative
framework for it will be determined by the Broadcasting Act which
becomes law in the Autumn of 1990, and while there may still be
opportunities for influencing the newly-created ITC on matters of
detail prior to the advertisement of the franchise in 1991 (and even
up to the scheduled launch in 1993), this does not reassure critics of
the indecent haste with which the Government is disposing of a
scarce and valuable national asset, almost certainly the last of its
kind.

Channel Five in Annan and Peacock

In fact, closer scrutiny reveals that a fifth terrestrial channel is far
from being a completely new prospect. for it formed a substantial
part of Annan's deliberations In a far-sighted chapter headed 'New
Services and Technological Developments'. Annan raised the
question of a fifth service in terms strikingly reminiscent of those
currently attaching to C5

We believe that when the money is available, there should be a
fifth television service, with stations which would provide services

to areas smaller than the present ITV regions but probably larger
than all but the largest conurbations. The service would be
planned to take far more account of the community of interest
and of local government areas Thus, for example, there would be
separate stations for Liverpool and Manchester, for the East and
for the West Midlands, for Edinburgh and for Glasgow, for North
and for South Wales It is of interest too that certain areas, as
various as Essex, North Devon, and Lincolnshire, have been
represented as neglected areas [13]

The Committee went on to suggest that 'the coverage areas of the
new stations would probably overlap far more than has been usual
in the United Kingdom' and would therefore require more
frequencies than one of the existing national television services on
Very High Frequency (VHF)
    Annan was imprecise on the question of whether a fifth channel
would be available to all areas of the UK, technical feasibility was,
in any case, outside his immediate brief He recognized that the use
of VHF Bands I and III for additional 625–line colour television
broadcast services after the projected phased discontinuation of
monochrome 405-line transmissions would be insufficient to provide
two additional services *throughout the country* [14] But whilst his
formulation can therefore be interpreted as a blueprint for, at most,
one full national service based on some sort of local area network
arrangement, it can equally be taken to imply a partial service
accessible to certain geographical areas only. If this heralded a
retreat from the public service principle of universal reach, it was for
purely technological reasons Annan was well aware that, although
the provision of the fourth channel would present no technical
difficulties, a fifth would inevitably encounter interference problems
He therefore suggested that 'in due course a fifth service should be
provided on an area basis, using frequencies in (VHF) Band III and
Band I'.[15] His report further noted that such an increase in regional
television would have to be carefully planned, manufacturers of
transmitting and receiving equipment would need several years
notice to prepare for it efficiently [16]
    This thinking seems decidedly more provident than that
underscoring the present plans for C5, and it is curious, in
particular, that the Peacock Report, which discussed 'spectrum
scarcity' mainly in relation to broadcasting finance, made no
substantive reference to a fifth television service at all [17] An
appendix, prepared by the Committee's Secretary, addressed the
technological considerations affecting frequency allocation but this
was only obliquely related to the main body of the Report,[18] which,
by implication, ruled out a fifth terrestrial service on the grounds
that no unused bandwidth remained at either UHF or VHF where
interference could be avoided Since Annan, VHF Bands I and III

13 *Annan Report* para 25 10

14 *ibid* para 25 8

15 *ibid* para 25 10 and
Recommendation 107

16 *ibid* para 25 11

17 *Peacock Report* Chapter 3 4

18 *Peacock Report* Appendix F A
simple guide to the
electromagnetic spectrum and
broadcasting (prepared by Dr R
Eagle) pp 168–176

had been entirely abandoned in favour of UHF Bands IV and V as carriers for television and, moreover, the UK already exceeded the European norm of three national services at UHF. The Appendix did allow for 'possibly a few low powered terrestrial local TV stations in some areas only', but, as Charles Jonscher has pointed out, Peacock's predominantly economic analysis made any further argument for C5 problematic given its conclusion that the advertising market was unlikely to grow sufficiently to sustain another advertising-financed channel. Although Peacock obviously had the BBC in mind, the argument was equally relevant to additional terrestrial services [19]

19 RTS Report, p 28

The technological context

The Government was clearly not content with the Peacock Report's *laissez-faire* conclusions on the subject of frequency availability, probably because such passivity hardly coincided with the Government's own aspirations concerning competition and choice In any case, the Government had before it a Consultants' Report which re-opened the possibility of additional services on UHF, and even on VHF, by using frequencies not currently assigned for UK broadcasting.[20] Consequently, in late 1987, the Government commissioned a detailed feasibility study and set up a steering group, chaired by the head of the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Radio Communications Division, and charged to investigate the technical feasibility of introducing a fifth national television service in the UHF Bands. The group included representatives from the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Civil Aviation Authority, the BBC and the IBA, and took advice from a range of other organizations with particular interests in spectrum usage.[21]

20 *Subscription Television* (May 1987) commissioned from Communications Studies and Planning International Ltd (later incorporated into Booz, Allen & Hamilton) See WP, paras 3 8 and 5 2–5 5

21 RTS Report p 30

The starting brief for the study was to look for ways of creating spare capacity among the existing 44 8MHz channels between channels 21 and 34 in Band IV and between 39 and 69 in Band V Since the existing UK use of the UHF part of the spectrum involves some 915 transmitter sites and 3,600 individual transmitter masts to serve 99 38 per cent of the population, each frequency is already used on average about eighty-three times, leaving virtually no free capacity After an early discovery that maximum population coverage of only about 17 per cent could be achieved within this pattern, the Steering Group shifted to a consideration of the five UHF frequencies, hitherto unused for broadcasting purposes, sited between the two Bands and at the very top of Band V These are channels 35 to 38 at the bottom of Band V and channel 69 at the top. which are currently used to varying degrees for radar, radio and ancillary applications Though the Steering Group encountered

22 *ibid*, pp 30–31

problems with every one of these frequencies, they eventually concluded that the only way of providing a realistic geographical coverage for a fifth service was to use channels 35 and 37 in tandem, which would entail switching over to vertically polarized transmission to provide improved discrimination and protection against two-way interference. In this way, the twenty-five main transmitter sites which together provide the maximum potential coverage would be able to reach up to 70 per cent of the population [22]

The feasibility study's interim frequency plan for C5 identified those areas of the country which, for reasons of adjacent international interference or proximity to radar installations, would *not* be able to receive the new channel by terrestrial means Some of these are precisely the ones most attractive to advertisers, including substantial parts of the affluent shires in the South and South East – Kent, Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, Berkshire, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Dorset, as well as parts of South Devon and North Cornwall Further north, large tracts of Central Wales, Gwynedd, Cumbria and the Isle of Man, the western counties of Ulster along with most of the more sparsely populated areas of Scotland would be outwith the channel's range In other words, all the major conurbations including London would be covered, while a number of more peripheral areas (including parts of the densely populated Home Counties that are unused to being called peripheral) would fall outside the interim frequency plan

The capital costs of providing this C5 transmission system are likely to be considerable After the intended privatization of the IBA transmitter network, the new operator will have to provide for the strengthening of existing transmission masts and the installation thereon of additional aerials capable of radiating vertically polarized signals A new distribution network will need to be engineered with associated computing and telemetry hardware. New technical developments in such areas as teletext, digital stereo and NICAM will also have to be allowed for A recent IBA estimate of the cost of this work was in the region of £18 million This envisaged the first five of the twenty-five stations as being on stream a year and a half after work commenced, the remaining twenty stations needed to raise the target coverage from 50 per cent to 70 per cent would take

23 Derek Chambers Assistant Director of Engineering IBA speaking at the Sheffield Channel Five Conference in May 1990

a further year [23] As for the consumer, s/he will be obliged to purchase and install a new receiver-antenna to cope with the shift from horizontal to vertical polarization The licence holders at C5's inception will not only have to cover their bids and revenue payments; they will be required under the Act to provide for the significant labour costs involved in retuning domestic video recorders and home computers away from channels 35, 36 or 37. The technical problems do not stop there Even VCR owners who do not wish to install an additional antenna for C5 reception will have to retune in order to avoid interference from neighbours who do take the

channel. And the assignment of frequencies to satellite TV receivers presents a further retuning complication, especially where a viewer has both Sky and British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) installed

The Government, accepting the case for frequencies 35 and 37, affirmed in the White Paper of November 1988 its interest in an additional *national* network – or series of regional networks – to be called Channel Five and available to 65–70 per cent of the population at UHF from the beginning of 1993, with perhaps some limited coverage earlier [24] Throughout 1988 and 1989, IBA engineers continued, nonetheless, to explore alternative prototypes for C5 designed to inject the missing *local* element into British television. In late 1989, IBA Head of Planning, Chris Rowley, floated the idea to the RTS of separate low-powered TV services to some sixty-three cities and towns using a similar number of transmitter stations. This would deliver genuinely local programming for which considerable viewer support is thought to exist But it would be nearly twice as expensive as the more modest twenty-five station proposal, would require more extensive international clearance agreements and would increase interference to the point where population coverage declined to only 50 per cent It might also fail to attract the interest of local advertisers since the smaller of the local stations would have catchment areas of as few as 100,000 viewers However, if the network of participating cities were reduced to between thirty and thirty-five, the minimum catchment area would rise to 300,000 or more, which would result in a viable service to 60 per cent of the population, using sixty-six transmitters and sustained by national as well as local advertising. Rowley believes his local stations could contribute some fifteen to twenty hours of new local programming per week to a C5 network which would make up the rest of its schedule with mainstream programming taken by all the network participants. Though this technical specification is unlikely to prevail, its importance lies in the fact that it has foregrounded a socially attractive (if commercially dubious) model of city-based TV within the C5 debate [25]

The licensing of Channel Five

The White Paper's formula for C5 was brief, vague and largely non-prescriptive, leaving structural decisions to the ITC It simply proposed the same regulatory regime as for Channel 3 and envisaged that C5 licences should be *national* in scope to balance the continuation of Channel 3's regional premise Significantly, it also opened the possibility of a franchise 'split up by time into two or more different licences covering different parts of the day and night' and hinted that any such segmentation might be sensitive to regional aspirations [26] By the time the Bill appeared, the likelihood of a

[24] WP paras 5 6–5 8

[25] Chris Rowley Channel 5 can it make viewers happy – and make money? *Television Journal of the Royal Television Society* Jan /Feb (1990) pp 9–15

[26] WP para 6 21

divided or multiple franchise seemed to have receded and ministers and commentators were talking in terms of a single, national franchise centred outside London and probably in a distinctly 'northern' location. Encouraged by Home Secretary Douglas Hurd's comments to this effect in his keynote speech to the 1989 RTS Cambridge Convention, this continued to be the most commonly theorized model until towards the end of the Commons proceedings in May 1990. after which discussion of alternatives, including a national network with a pattern of local opt-outs or a system of city-based stations, was resumed, following strong hints from Broadcasting Minister David Mellor that the Government was prepared to shift on this point Speaking at the Bill's Report Stage, Mellor referred favourably to discussions with Chairman-Designate of the ITC, George Russell, concerning the possibility of local opt-outs involving some fifty participating towns and cities, thus establishing a C5 national network on a local, rather than a regional, basis Mellor even implied that such a dimension might serve as the guarantee of 'quality' permitting the ITC to award the franchise to someone other than the highest bidder. The Bill, as brought to the Lords in early June, certainly did not preclude the ITC from acting in this way and, significantly, carried an extra sub-section to Clause 26 reinforcing the ITC's statutory right to determine that 'Channel 5 shall be provided under a particular licence only between such times of the day or on such days of the week (or both) as they may determine' Consequential amendments, adding further sub-sections to Clause 28, made explicit provision for more than one C5 licence to be in force at the same time It can therefore be inferred that henceforth any lobbying by city or local interests will be more profitably directed at the ITC than at the Home Office or the DTI.

A non-metropolitan channel?

Many responses to the White Paper (including the IBA's) argued that C5 offered an unprecedented opportunity for locating a national television channel outside London and the South-East. Paul Bonner of the ITV Association, for example, proposed a London-based holding company which would supervise a network of community stations in areas too small to sustain an ITV or Channel 3 contractor and hence marginally represented to date in the commercial sector Another suggestion was for a regionally-based C5 headquarters to compensate for the 'Southern' bias of the four existing channels, while yet another envisaged a 'northern consortium' operating across a number of different areas, including Scotland Before long, interested parties were focussing attention upon specific northern locations, and the general idea that C5 should be centred 'somewhere north of the M1's Watford Gap Service Area' started to

gain a powerful foothold. In the summer of 1989, several Northern cities formally entered the fray and began to mount publicity campaigns designed to attract the channel's headquarters to their gates. Liverpool, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Bradford and Glasgow all declared a C5 interest, their different sales strategies expressing a common regional development aspiration Liverpool's case, for example, relied considerably on the high profile of Phil Redmond, whose Mersey Television and New Media Age companies have already done much to promote Merseyside as an alternative site for media production and employment Sheffield seconded Sylvia Harvey, a media studies academic at the local Polytechnic, to a research position within the City Council and charged her with the task of making recommendations on Sheffield's cultural industry policy generally and on C5 in particular.[27] Scotland took a different tack the Scottish Development Agency focussed attention upon Scotland as *nation* rather than region and concentrated on making a national, as opposed to a city, case.

27 See 'Television 2000 The White Paper on Broadcasting Sheffield City Council s Response to the Home Office February 1989

An editorial in *Broadcast* on the eve of the Sheffield Conference remarked that 'it is now seen as so inevitable that C5 will be based outside London that it has ceased to be debated at all' and warned against the conference allowing itself to be 'hijacked by vested interests' concerned more 'to satisfy civic pride than cultural and social needs' [28] Subsequent articles in *Broadcast*[29] and *The Listener*[30] made similar assumptions about a non-metropolitan location, seen as increasingly likely in the wake of David Mellor's Report Stage speech. In the week before Sheffield, Gus Macdonald of Scottish Television responded to Mellor's change of heart on local opt-outs by advocating a particular Scottish model for C5 This envisaged five 'city stations' grouped in a consortium based on Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee (or Perth) and Inverness, incurring about £10 million start-up expenditure and annual running costs of £3–4 million [31] Conservative MP Emma Nicholson had meanwhile attracted attention for her idea of a local community network catering for communities smaller than those covered by the existing ITV companies Neither of these suggestions appears to include the element of UK-wide programming that financial commentators deem necessary to the financial survival of C5. The Government insists only that it does not envisage C5 as a clone ITV network and is accordingly unattracted to any kind of federal structure which might tempt it to become so, the rest, it says, is up to the ITC. And if the legislation's wording does not permit the granting of a series of local licences direct, it does empower the ITC to award a national franchise to a licensee who could either manage its own local services or sub-contract them locally. It therefore seems safe to conclude that the broad argument for geographical dispersal has been accepted

The question of C5's location has taken precedence over its

28 Five s drive', *Broadcast* 18 May 1990 p 7
29 Peter Goodwin, A channel in the making *Broadcast*, 8 June 1990, pp 16–17
30 See note 9

31 Reported in *Broadcast* 18 May 1990

broadcasting policy to such an extent that 'non-metropolitanism' has itself become inscribed as the channel's only remit. Compared to the C4 debate, the deliberations about C5 have paid scant attention to what the new entrant will actually look like and how it will conduct its business. The Government has always been clear that C5 will have to compete to survive in a multi-channel environment financed by different funding mechanisms. It can expect none of the special privileges afforded to Channel Four, cushioning it from the need to maximize audiences Instead, it will have to float free in an expanded market and sink or swim according to its ability to sustain a viable audience for a broad mix of programming. That being so, C5 may, by a curious twist of fate, come to replace C4 as the 'second factor' in the commercial, terrestrial equation It will be a rival, rather than an ally, to C3 but will carry much the same programme obligations C4, meanwhile, is effectively being moved in a different direction Although it will henceforth have to compete for advertising business, it is to enjoy a measure of revenue protection which should lessen its exposure to the rigours of the market C4's unique brief will be powerfully reinforced by the philosophical shift implied in the change of title from Company to Corporation. The exact correspondence of this change to that experienced by the BBC in 1927 is not without irony; the only essential difference is the lack of a Royal Charter Herein lies an interesting paradox, for while so much of the new legislation envisages conditions of deregulation and privatization, C4 is to experience a degree of 'nationalization' through its conversion from wholly-owned subsidiary to public corporation The consequences for C5 remain to be seen.

Ownership and Finance

As the Bill stood at the time of writing the length of the C5 licence period is ten years the same as for Channels 3 and 4 and 'non-domestic satellite services'. Many observers believe this to be insufficient because of the high initial start-up costs and general uncertainty inevitably attached to C5 and have urged the Government to extend this period – at least in the first franchise round – to the fifteen years already accorded to a highly capital intensive venture like BSB. An amendment to the Bill before it completes its passage would seem to be essential if the ITC is to be sure of attracting quality bidders who can visualize a realistic return on their investment before the end of the franchise period The massive outlay on publicity and re-tuning which faces the first licensees clearly postpones the prospects for profitability in conditions currently familiar to Sky and BSB. The Government did, in late June 1990, show some recognition of this inhibiting factor

when it belatedly acceded to pressure to impose a moratorium on C3 and C5 takeovers for one year after airing but continued to dissemble on the question of the C5 licence period. Some city analysts venture to say that C5 cannot possibly be viable in a free market with anything less than a fifteen year franchise The smaller-scale revenue opportunities likely to be afforded by a local opt-out arrangement look even more precarious in light of this. A Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte report, for example, describes C5 as having 'some of the characteristics of a poisoned chalice' and warns

> 'local opt-outs for C5 are unlikely to be financially viable and do seem to be a technology-led rather than a commercially-led suggestion   It is tempting to speculate that the suggestion to weaken it by splitting it or by requiring local opt-outs might be the result of lobbying by those with most to fear from its success '[32]

32 Reported in *Broadcast*, 1 June 1990

Although the Government originally intended C5 to come on stream at the same time as the new C3 licences on 1 January 1993, many commentators have declared such a timetable unrealistic given that the Government has still to organize the privatization of the IBA transmitter network and has refused to authorize prior construction of the new transmitter installations required for C5. A later start for C5 would almost certainly introduce a new set of problems since the channel would be unable to commence its marketing on terms comparable to those enjoyed by the new C3 licensees or the reformed C4. Sue Stoessl, former C4 Head of Marketing, emphasizes that C5's best chance of success depends on a start coinciding with C3 since the commencement of new ITV franchises has always in the past been the moment of greatest upheaval in the schedules when the audience is at its most flexible Another set of viewer options is more easily assimilated when it accompanies wholesale change.[33]

33 Sue Stoessl speaking at the Sheffield C5 Conference in May 1990 See also RTS Report pp 26–28

All the post-Act terrestrial services will have to contend with enhanced competition from projected Astra, Eutelsat and Kopernikus satellite launches, not to mention additional cable franchise awards, but if there should be a significant delay beyond 1993, the competitive regime facing a new C5 entrant will be further intensified by subsequent developments in satellite, cable and MVDS, many of which would be particularly threatening to any local ambitions for C5 Kleinwort Benson's Bronwen Maddox, speaking at the Sheffield conference and subsequently writing in *Broadcast*,[34] articulated the fears of many when discussing the formidable economic obstacles confronting a channel that, far from being the *fifth* available in the UK, would by the time of its arrival – possibly as late as 1994/5 – be something like the fifty-eighth, not counting cable! The enormous up-front costs of a channel competing on unequal terms for a limited audience, already well served by

34 Bronwen Maddox, C5 given vote of no confidence *Broadcast* 8 June 1990

plenty of choice, would, she argues, be sufficient to deter even the most enthusiastic potential bidder. Most analysts believe that no C5 model could expect to achieve a positive cash flow until the late '90s, and Maddox points out that it is insufficient merely to show a profit; investors need an acceptable return within a reasonable period. In the face of all these risks, might it not be easier all round to put C5 onto satellite? This begs the further question: if an Astra transponder might eventually have to be used anyway, to fill the C5 frequency plan gaps and achieve more than 70 per cent coverage, why not simply deliver the channel by satellite to *all* dish owners and renters within the satellite's footprint? Even the transponder rental at something in the region of £5 million a year together with an ambitious publicity campaign to promote faster domestic take-up of satellite would be far cheaper than the terrestrial start-up costs envisaged This option would bring not only the added advantage of increased business for manufacturers and installers of British satellite equipment but would also deliver a potentially pan-European audience to advertisers.

Financing C5 by subscription, though permitted by the Bill, is thought to be a non-starter, for a number of reasons Though Canal Plus in France has successfully negotiated this funding method, it is probably too late to introduce a single subscription channel into Britain when better-value subscriber options for multiple and themed channels are already widely available to cable and satellite viewers In any case, there is the problem of viewer resistance to additional decoder technology coupled with the relative insecurity of encryption on the Phase Alternate Line (PAL) format But the biggest disadvantage is that Sky and BSB have already bought up most of the movies and sporting events that offer the most attractive subscribable material C5, as a late entrant, would be unable to compete in this area of popular programming

Advertising, therefore, is C5's only realistic revenue source and opinions are divided as to whether there will be sufficient advertising money to go round There is also uncertainty about the likely value and profitability of local advertising if one of the local options for C5 is adopted Booz, Allen & Hamilton, who produced a special report for the Scottish Development Agency on the prospects for C5, have essayed one of the more optimistic financial projections, but even this envisages a cumulative cash flow deficit increasing to £500–600 million during the first five years They do, however, suggest that, subject to the right conditions concerning start date, coverage and competition, C5 might look forward to a rising advertising revenue of from £100 million to over £400 million between 1994 and 2003 [35] This, and the prospect of a reduced Government levy to subsidize the disproportionate start-up costs, might just be enough to keep bidders interested

There are many conflicting estimates of the likely cost to a

35 Janice Hughes of Booz Allen & Hamilton speaking at the Sheffield C5 Conference in May 1990

licensee of the complicated VCR re-tuning obligation, ranging from Sir Denis Forman's (Granada Television) figure of £60–£100 million to Paul Bonner's calculation of around £400 million. The variant estimates take different base figures for UK VCR ownership and assume fees of between £10 and £80 per domestic visit to effect the small adjustment believed to be necessary Nobody really knows yet quite what will be involved The IBA's Chris Rowley thinks that the exercise may not be as complicated and costly as many have

36 Chris Rowley p 13

feared.[36] The UK has 10–11 million homes with VCRs and over 14 million machines If 50 per cent of 10 million addresses needed a re-tuning visit at a cost of around £20 each, the total cost would be in the region of £100 million However, other factors need to be considered Firstly, the IBA thinks VCR adjustments can be made at the same time as installation of the new vertically polarized aerial. Since the viewer will pay for the aerial, there may be some scope here for absorbing the re-tuning cost in a way that will reduce the burden on the C5 contractor Secondly, polarization variations in different areas indicate that many fewer VCRs may be affected than has hitherto been calculated IBA planners continue to examine this question, but there remains the possibility of a massive public information campaign aimed at instructing viewers without a C5 aerial how to make their own adjustment, thereby minimizing the number of service calls to be made by engineers.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable financial and technical obstacles, there are still some credible programme producers keen to be associated with a bid for Britain's C5 The two most visible have been Mike Bolland and Phil Redmond. Bolland, a former C4 Commissioning Editor is currently a partner in a new venture, Initial Film & Television which plans to be the nucleus of a consortium bidding for an alternative commercial channel, located in Scotland but catering for audiences elsewhere in the UK Redmond, originator of *Grange Hill* and *Brookside* and Chairman of Mersey Television, is coordinating the interests of the New Media Age consortium which would like to operate the channel from Merseyside. Understandably, neither has so far been prepared to reveal much about their programming plans. Peter Goodwin thinks it 'not improbable that the choice will end up between a Redmond-led bid centred round some of the north of England towns and a

37 Peter Goodwin p 17

Bolland-led bid based in Scotland',[37] but this forecast may well be premature.

Both Bolland and Redmond believe that C5 should be a single-franchise channel operated from one location with a popular and quality programming mix permitting local and regional access to a national channel. Both maintain that local TV should properly be left to MVDS and cable and that it is the *national* advertising market at which C5 should aim so as to avoid further intrusion into the local market already well tapped by newspapers, radio and

eventually, C3. According to Bolland, the local TV imperative could even be served by resurrecting the idea of a sixth low-powered channel Meanwhile, C5 offers the first serious challenge to C3 (given the special nature of C4) and should therefore be developed as a fully commercial undertaking. Redmond has already unsuccessfully attempted to enter local TV, having lobbied the Home Office and IBA since 1984 for permission to open a local station in Liverpool using a frequency other than 35 or 37 with a cheap aerial and no VCR re-tuning problem. While he is glad to see this idea now being taken seriously, he does not consider it the workable way forward for C5 He has gone on record a number of times as saying that C5 should be planned as an entrepreneurial opportunity, not a cultural imposition. Handled sensibly, it could become the dominant channel in the late '90s because of its freedom from network and scheduling constraints. It should not be entrusted to 'C3 losers' and, to avoid this, it should be awarded in advance of the C3 contracts. The real concern for the ITC, he believes, is not the amount of up-front money or specific programme ideas, but the overall quality of the bidding consortia [38]

38 See RTS Report, pp 23–26 and 'On to a fifth dimension *Media Guardian* 14 May 1990

Although many speakers at the Sheffield C5 conference counselled against a delayed contract award, Paul Bonner (ITVA) and Wilf Stevenson (British Film Institute) took the view that more time was needed to determine the location, funding and structure of the new channel One suggested an ITC Working Party, the other a Royal Commission to review all the options, allowing a clearer picture of the prospects for satellite TV to emerge and for the outcome of the BBC Charter review in 1996 to be taken into account Stevenson went on to suggest some of the more radical solutions possible if more time were available The C5 and C4 frequencies could, for example, be switched; C4, already a minority channel, could be transferred partly to satellite with less difficulty than C5 C3, already regional, could become local with the rejigging of franchise areas into a smaller C3 network, thereby freeing up space for C5 and making it genuinely competitive. Some BBC involvement could be considered, as could various European options which would render C5 less parochial There certainly seems to be a good case for considering these ideas before hastening to a formula that might subsequently be regretted

A terrestrial Channel Five – why bother?

For the Government, the purpose of C5 is to enhance broadcasting choice for a majority of British viewers at relatively modest unit cost, while stimulating competition by bringing 'significant relief to the advertising market',[39] even though the statutory framework permits franchisees 'to determine their own mix between advertising

39 WP para 6 21

40 ibid

and subscription'[40] But an overriding question persists in the light of the colossal financial risks. Why, if new means of signal delivery with virtually unlimited carrying capacity are increasingly available at substantially lower global cost, does a consumer-oriented government bother with all the attendant risks of further terrestrial services which are already anachronistic? Any answer must include the suspicion that the Government fears that satellite, cable and MVDS are even more volatile financially and may not find favour with a national audience weaned on decades of public service and possibly sceptical of subscription and pay-per-view Certainly cable in the UK has been a good while coming, and even if its installation is now accelerating as a result of increased US investment, most would-be subscribers will still have a long wait for it 'Domestic satellite services', as defined in Chapter III of the Bill, are, for the forseeable future, aligned exclusively with BSB The most that can be expected by way of further diversity depends either on BSB's assumption at some future date of unwanted Irish transponders or on a successful UK application to the 1992 WARC Conference for further DBS frequencies 'Non-domestic satellite services', of which Sky is the paradigm, are by their nature less susceptible to national regulation It seems, therefore, that non-terrestrial delivery systems cannot be relied upon to increase choice at low cost in ways that comply with the quality imperative They might, and probably will, but equally their economic circumstances might preclude them from doing so, forcing their programming inexorably down-market

How much safer, then, to shift the burden of risk on to potential operators, thereby guaranteeing a nominal increase in consumer choice as part of a package licensed and regulated by the same new 'light touch' regime to which C3 and C4 will also be subjected? Further, C5, another public utility to be privatized, will produce substantial Exchequer revenue The Government wins out all round, ensuring an extra channel largely at the expense of the private sector What remains to be seen is whether the viewer will eventually be the beneficiary

reports

Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Washington, May 1990

Symptomatically yours

IN March of this year, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the American equivalent of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, ran an article headlined, 'Once-Theoretical Scholarship on Film is broadened to include History of Movie Industry practices change marks a shift away from use of psychoanalysis, Marxism and semiotics to interpret works' [1] As headlines go, this upmarket version, evoking the image of Rupert Murdoch seduced by a subscription to *Screen* or *Velvet Light Trap*, has much in common with its less wordy cousins in the tabloid press For one thing, it is a half truth – cinema history has hardly been excluded from the field, though it may have attracted less attention than the 'cultural studies' wing of the enterprise Again the tag 'once-theoretical' was, as the following text made clear, really a misnomer for 'over-theoretical' or, *horribile dictu*, 'ideological' A 'no longer' theoretical study is hard to imagine if only because historians, conjured up by the *Chronicle* writer as paragons of sound research, have theories Finally, and more important, this headline was, like a tabloid's, a rush to judgement The *Chronicle* is an organ of professional opinion-making and the public acknowledgement of a need to move out of the 'dead end of theory' and get down to 'basic spadework', even if situationally correct, is positioned to be read as an admission of a more systemic failure Would professionals in other fields consider an activity 'scholarly' if it allowed theoretical advances to be unimpeded by the claims of evidence?

But there is a need to go further than weighing how a potentially bad notice in the *Chronicle* is likely to influence the view of outsiders – though given the perception that areas such as the humanities and cultural studies are unscholarly (a well worn theme in *Chronicle* pages) this is bad enough Such a notice can be seen as another salvo in the battle to 'purify' cinema studies of the ideological baggage of the seventies. On one account such baggage – of which, of course, *Screen* was the head porter – is, like bell bottoms, biliously *passé* Apparently awash with the aesthetic nausea that yesterday's fashions alone can evoke, the 1989 SCS Conference recommended the detailed study of the early cinema as a purgative to the tired myths of 'Big Theory' and discerned a new paradigm amassing on the horizon – Cognitivism [2]

Indeed, Cognitivism, which, its advocates modestly claim, is less of a movement than a move – albeit a move that dare not speak its name – continues to prosper Both Noel Carroll and David Bordwell, rather like latter day Daniel Bells, have launched strong arguments that support a call for the end of ideology in cinema and film studies.[3] Certainly Bordwell, in the *Chronicle* article, manages to suggest that the study of films as '"symptomatic" of a period or a culture' is antithetical to sound research For Bordwell, it seems, an ideological approach has a necessary kinship with fox-hunting it is where the unmanageable can be seen chasing the imponderable [4]

In general, then, these are turbulent times in the field There is the pathetic evocation of a dying scholasticism and the appending of

1 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* March 21 1990 pp A6–A8

2 Ian Christie Lives of the film scholars *Sight and Sound* Winter 1989 pp 177–8 and p 194 But if tie-dye tee shirts are back surely bell bottoms may spring from behind?

3 N Carroll *Mystifying Movies* (New York Columbia University Press 1988) Chapter Two Though in fairness to Carroll his discussion still engages with the concept

4 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* March 21 1990, p A8 See also D Bordwell *Making Meaning* (Mass Harvard University Press 1989), especially Chapter 4

this image to the principle – rather than to particular examples – of ideological analysis *per se* All this may indeed be a 'symptom' of the onset of professionalization in cinema studies and, at the level of individual motives, this probably explains much of the heat Yet, the attack on the principle of studying film as a cultural indicator – usually by the indirect tactic of relegating such questions to the day, which is the Twelfth of Never, when all the evidence is in – seems to add fuel to the revisionist mood that is threatening to engulf higher learning and the art establishment in America Whether in the form of a call to return to the classical canon or an appeal for the standardization of the vocabulary of culture, the era of 'repressive tolerance' seems on the verge of a collapse into the Age of the Signal, wherein things are what they are and had better not be 'Other' wise

In relation to this scenario, this year's SCS conference cut an unrepentant figure A crude enumeration of the sixty-four three or four paper sessions – devised it seemed by someone who has embraced the muscle-chiseller's dictum: no pain, no gain – shows that over a third, noticeably well-attended sessions, were devoted to issues of identity and subjectivity Not surprisingly, issues of class identity provided only a small element of the 'poetics of domination'. Race – and here the work of British filmmakers such as Julien, Kureishi-Frears and Sankofa provided exemplars – and gender were the dominant focuses, albeit in a mood of reassessment In particular, the limitations of gender theorization – its tendency towards ahistoricity and ethnocentricism – became an implicit (and explicit in a paper by Jane Gaines) *leitmotif* in a number of papers on 'post-colonial' cinema Generally, though the term is too bland, multiculturalism is back on the agenda – possibly in response to a changing student population – but signalling nonetheless a welcome return to the level of the collective subject Once again, this was a

muscular and discourse theory inflected variant of multiculturalism, since it spoke in the name of the oppressed and sought to expose the factual 'marginality' of metropolitan culture and this historically limited formation's reliance on the periphery as a source of the 'forbidden and exotic' This emphasis was underscored by a plenary session devoted to 'Third World' or Post-colonial Cinema and focused on the issue (unresolved) of a black aesthetic Indeed, the embrace of 'otherness' acquired a Buddhist dimension, in a session devoted to 'Other Species' Regrettably, as a barely reformed Rin-Tin-Tin fan, I missed a paper on cinematic identification and the canine Other

The second largest area of concern was genre – melodrama, teenpics and documentary – and the fate of such an analytical tool in the era of multigenericity and pastiche. It was in this area that cinema studies attempted to grapple with the alleged arrival of the postmodern and with the increasing impact of multimedia texts and intertextuality. It was not all a success and, indeed, one paper must have made structuralists in the audience (if anyone will admit to this today) itchy with *déjà vu*, since it argued that monogenericity (all genres are basically Westerns) underlay surface differences anyway

Film and television history, slated as an expanding area in the 1989 conference, took a modest third place, and even here, as in a paper by Richard de Cordova on children's matinée shows. concepts of moral regulation and Foucauldian discursive practices belied a simple resort to empiricism This left, in descending order of dedicated time, film and the other arts, stardom and celebrity. spectatorship and, unmistakable sign of the times, only one session devoted explicitly to auteurism – the films of John Cassavetes – to round out the offering of over 250 separate papers

On this tally, a 'culturalist' approach is not

only far from being *passé*, but is being subjected to a sustained internal refinement Thus, for example. Richard Dyer's characterization of entertainment as a concrete Utopia was given a new critical edge in relation to the concept of submerged ethnicities, in a paper by Ella Shohat which played on the Bakhtinian notion of determinant absence Indeed. the relevance of Bakhtin to film studies warranted a session of its own and Robert Stam provided an eloquent demonstration of the usefulness of Bakhtinian concepts to the analysis of post-colonial cinema

As for Cognitivism, which certainly needs to be addressed as a serious challenge to 'culturalism', there was little evidence that this new approach was being vigorously applied – though the single session devoted explicitly to 'theory' recognized the need to develop a theory of spectatorship that would treat consciousness as more than an 'alibi' for unconscious processes. Thus, Richard Allen, *pace* Noel Carroll, argued that a cognitive approach need not entail a dismissal of the notion of illusion, and, in a separate paper, Vincent Rocchio criticized the Kristevan view of the self as split between an imaginary plenitude and the reductive, 'signature' identities afforded by the symbolic On a correct reading of Lacan both the conscious and the unconscious are inscribed within, rather than across, the boundary of the symbolic. Both these papers lend some support to Bordwell's contention that the conscious, the perceptible, must be regarded as an integral moment rather than a mere deformation of the 'unconscious' And we were lucky to have a reminder of a traditional psychoanalytic approach in a subsequent session which exposed *Back To The Future 1* and *2* as an obsessional play on the fear of mature genital sexuality After that, simply to mention McFly seemed like a tasteless and horribly revealing pun.

Relatively new arrivals were not without their problems, however. Papers in separate

sessions on postmodernism and Deconstructionism seemed oblivious to the potential incompatibility between these positions and what were actually rather traditional characterological and plot analyses Nor was there any attempt to address the issue, already thoroughly worked over by 'structural' film theorists such as Gidal, of how mainstream cinema can escape from the 'burden' of reference, though sessions on documentary and 'free' cinema raised many issues that were central to this kind of debate. Stranger still, for a British visitor, was the view that youth subcultures (as if only punk ever happened) were necessarily cultures of resistance Come back generation gap, all is riven. Such are the vagaries of transplantation.

Lastly, the issue of the conservative mood and the threat to cinema studies (not to mention cultural studies in general) surfaced in a session on film canons, which identified some of the key issues is the notion of a canon, with its emphasis on universalism, intrinsically inimical to popular cultural politics, and how should the process of preservation be pursued, given that there is an ongoing conflict between commercialism, marketability and the sustenance of popular memory?

As the range of topics suggests, cinema studies is unrepentantly 'symptomatic' and in view of one particularly marked absence – the political economy of cultural production – culturalist rather than materialist Perhaps the least attractive aspect of the conference was the presentational format – the legendary twenty minutes – which condemns the speaker to rather unfocused observations or to the heroics of the fast read – not to mention weeks of rehearsal and memorization Perhaps the *Guinness Book of Records* should be contacted?

But joking aside, this format left very little time for sustained debate and the writer would have to admit to a vague impression that there was an element of ritual and

display rather than engagement underlying the proceedings. Again, given so many papers, there was the inevitable perception that people in Room A should be talking to people in Room B Certainly a number of besetting questions were not collectively addressed (and doubtless other participants could think of others), e g. what is the status of reference given the phenomenon of intertextuality in the cinema? what does the wave of anti-foundational theories, such as postmodernism, mean for the traditional concept of textual analysis; has not the latter, which proposes the theorist as an expert in relation to 'lay' readings, lost its ratification? To what extent is the notion of a film canon an issue in professionalism rather than an issue in the formation of popular memory? What new modes of consumption and production are enabled by new technologies and what old forms are disabled?

These are all contentious issues and it would be wrong to suggest that they were not touched upon in the sessions I attended. I cannot say, for want of several clones, that they did not receive sustained scrutiny in the sessions that I missed. But it seems to me, at least, that one sign of maturity in a disciplinary field is that it becomes plausible to forsake a wide spread of topics – always a pleasing chance to hear something unexpected – for a focus on a smaller number of key issues To some extent a certain amount of eclecticism goes along with an absence of funding for sustained research programmes and US graduate education seems to favour the *bricoleur*. Nonetheless, an absence of debate and conflict-avoidance seem to underlie the spectacle of diversity How productive this experience was is difficult to say Certainly as the conferees emerged into the 'hyperreal' space of the atrium of the Washington Hyatt, there were signs of over-stimulation Jostling through the evening crowd of tourists, Prom-night partygoers and R & R seeking executives, it was easy to spot them They were the

ones who took notes when someone spoke

Barry King

They do conferences, don't they?

AFTER several years in smaller host venues, the Society for Cinema Studies, the largest professional society devoted to film scholarship in the United States, congregated in the nation's capital, indeed at the Capitol Hill Hyatt Regency, during Memorial Day weekend, May 25–27 Despite occasional sideswiping remarks from some Big City types that Bozman, Montana ('88) and Iowa City, Iowa ('89) had added insult to injury, the University of Iowa's condensed and convenient facilities, legendarily spawning more college and university-employed film PhD's than any other programme in North America, gave the conference a cohesiveness unchallenged by the numerous 'distractions' of, say, New York or Chicago DC not only attracted film scholars that weekend but also a columned motorcycle arcade of veterans headed for the Viet Nam War Memorial, and a teeming public for the many-splendoured museums around the Mall with their relevant exhibits on the reception of American television, Information Age 1990 at the National Museum of American History, and an interactive video exhibit of corporate sponsorship which drew top honours for popularity among conferees

The Hyatt itself – convenient to trains and cabs at Union Station but postmodernist in its interior dislocations (rooms named 'Grand Teton', 'Yosemite', 'Glacier', 'Bryce' and 'Olympic' not to mention the book exhibit in the 'Hall of Battles') – was an ironic reminder not just that we weren't in Iowa any more, but that we were in a city whose mayor was under seige for white collar crime in the international drug trade. This was a disturbing material context, not unlike the

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American Studies meeting at the Versailles
Hotel in Miami last year Cinema Studies in
the United States is marked, like American
popular culture, by ageing 'young turks' who
rousted their seniors decades ago As such it
faces the paradox of being an 'establishment'
of peripheralized public debate. Russell
Jacoby's essay, 'The decline of American
intellectuals', haunted my conference hall
wanderings that tipped, in wearier moments
between *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Night of
the Living Dead*

I don't mean to be sarcastic about a
painful reality – that American academics
find themselves congregating at expensive
hotels to share a critical assessment of their
cultural experience – or to let this spirit of
ennui dominate It deserves to be
acknowledged, however, as not incidental to
our intellectual and professional condition
The tenor in the crowded rooms we
populated certainly recognized that original
critical work with political energy and
significance has not been cornered by the
American university (increasingly
compromised by its escalating tuition costs)
But this professional conference was an
important site of critical recognition and
resistance to the 'Market Over All'
atmosphere of deepening economic anxiety,
and I saw several initiatives that took the
critical energy of this 'child of the sixties'
field into and beyond ivy-coloured halls

It's definitely uphill in a neo-conservative
climate, but the struggle is enjoined 1) to
foreground race and, inextricably, class as
issues to theorize in a highly homogeneous
academic sphere, 2) to push the boundaries
of popular culture into original contexts, a
continuation and extension of our mandate to
challenge canons; 3) to attend to the quality
of conference presentation as a performance
of criticism which should have the verve of
teachers of the popular

Emergent impulses at SCS sometimes show
up in the form of Task Forces, one of which
last year in Iowa made a commitment to take

a step beyond the invitation of black
filmmakers to plenaries that offer an
important but isolated forum in an
overwhelmingly white professional
organization. Spearheaded by Linda Dittmar
and Janice Welsch, the Task Force organized
subcommittees on outreach, pedagogy and
conference planning that went from impetus
to systematic efforts to turn token
appearance into a substantial presence. In
addition to panels labelled for their focus on
ethnicity, numerous other analyses, such as
Richard Grupenhoff's work on black cast
1930s Western musicals, Michael Budd and
Clay Steinman's work on audience reception
of *The Cosby Show* and Kelley Conway's
work on assessing Oprah Winfrey's popular
bonding to an audience that has made her
the richest woman on television (and the
third to own her own studio), offered a
continuity across more traditional categories
of discussion.

The presence and discussion of numerous
black scholars, men and women of colour –
Manthia Diawara, Mark Reid, Edward
Guerrero, Poonam Arora, among others –
who enjoined the project of what used to be
called 'consciousness raising' but is now, I
think, a more pointed challenge to the
pervasive ethnocentrism of American culture,
constituted a positive resource in the process
of pushing against previous limits, awareness
and commitments of film and television
scholars Valuable as the plenary session on
'Black Aesthetics and Film' chaired by
Francoise Pfaff was, in recognizing and
positioning its topic's eminence in our
professional and cultural agenda, it is no
detraction to say that the exchanges in
workshops on pedagogy and the discussion
on panels more clearly marked the
progression from last year's conference to
this, from respectful listening to more
genuine exchange Another step

A further step for SCS's meeting in Los
Angeles next year might be for the material
that gained a stronger footing this year to

confront and challenge the theoretical debates that were less foregrounded but recurred again and again in currents beneath the surface Ellen Shohat's figuring of 'submerged ethnicities' in vocal accents and snatches of music in Hollywood commercial film, for example, worked well with Bob Stam's Bakhtinian discussion of the orchestration of voices and ethnic dialogism as a relational vision, a polyphony that sees the core of American experience from the margins. Her insistence that the word 'ethnic' itself marginalizes with the implication that some ethnic groups are not ethnic but the hegemonic norm, recalled that shift some years ago when feminist criticism tilted from women *per se* toward the social construction of gender That historic progression was suggested by Marsha Kinder's criticism/suggestion that submerged voices need not preoccupy us when various independent cinemas offer a direct address I would anticipate future conferences and scholarship to engage these controversies of method and theory in the wake of the feminist initiative on gender Indeed, this is what Keyan Tomaselli's response to the panel on 'Film and the "Exotic"' called for: confronting the issues raised elsewhere of postmodernism's disempowering of the Third World resurgence or of the relevance of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory for the Third World spectator

The continuing project of examining gender occupies a sizeable dimension of SCS conference research. This year it incorporated two focuses of interest across panels reproductive rights and the mixing of gay and lesbian dimensions of sexuality with the heterosexual. Reproductive rights, as constraints upon motherhood in late capitalist America, were taken up, for example, in Mary Desjardin's assessment of *Baby Boom*'s progressive potential to demonstrate the social constructedness of motherhood in the comedic closing of the gap between mother and child and to critique corporate

capitalism. Desjardin saw this subverted by a nostalgic capitalism, rooted in the heroine's class privilege of bypassing the repression of single working mothers and conspicuously refusing nationally subsidized daycare. Like the foregrounding of class superiority in good parenting in the 'Baby M' case, women divided by class interests return us to the paradigm of *Stella Dallas*. Laurie Schultz finds in *Criminal Law* a punishing morality of figuring the abyss not as the psyche of the serial killer who mutilates and kills women who abort but as the empty womb itself, a position echoed by Cynthia Fuchs in a paper explicitly titled 'The horror of aborting men'. And using resources for extra-, intra- and textual analysis, Nina Liebman and Lynn Joyrich spanned the decades from the 1950s to the 1980s in a contextual examination of birth control and pregnancy

The newly emergent Gay and Lesbian Task Force promises a challenge to the dominance of heterosexual assumptions and a profound enrichment of the discussion of gender, which this conference anticipated The mixing of gay and heterosexual conceptions of desire across panels was clear in the connections between Tom Waugh's analysis of the homoerotic in turn-of-the-century photography and Gaylyn Studlar's argument that fan magazines demonstrate the power of female audiences to construct male objects of desire, to make men in the image of their desire, as emotionally accessible if not as volatile, even as Roberta Pearson was contending that the Frederick March/James Mason acting styles and personae signalled a 1950s resurgence of the emotionally expressive male hero This mix, marked and unmarked, was highlighted by panels on both masculinity and lesbian film criticism While Chris Holmlund and Danae Clark examined the appearance of lesbian representation in mainstream media. in *Heartbeat* and *Mirabella* respectively, to assess the stereotypes and subtleties of cultural labelling and recognition. Chris Straayer challenged

not only gay and hetero boundaries but appropriately engaged representational practice and argument, using video clips of gay and straight pornography, medical and avant-garde films to counterpoint her verbal challenge of the degree to which binary sexual categories are themselves an ideological discourse

A Laurie Anderson-like presence, Straayer exemplified another strain in SCS's emergent panoply of practices a greater incorporation of media into presentation as performance Evident in the simultaneity of presentation rather than 'and if there's time I have a clip to show' (a chocolate of pleasure!), Scott Bukatman's discourse on Disney's 'phenomenology of progress in Tomorrowland' similarly shared sensory billing with a muzak-like accompaniment of ambient imaged Disney-esque environments. David James and Mike Sinclair incorporated video illustration during their diverse commentary on Jonas Mekas's *Walden* and Bruce Springsteen's personalized anti-spectacle video so that the original work is recontextualized in analysis This approach may indicate both a meritorious concern with the conditions of reception and a pushing of the boundaries of spectatorship into production of cultural performance

Last year, sessions constructed upon theoretical debates provided the arguable core around which other patterns and tendencies developed. One might have expected the cognitive theory vs culturalist debate incipient in David Bordwell's panel on cognitivism to have emerged fullblown in the wake of Bordwell's *Making Meaning. The Rhetoric of Interpretation*. But the absence of Bordwell, Andrew and Browne and the lowkey presence of Elsaesser, Nichols and others shifted energy to other sites Ongoing theoretical issues recurred in surprising places, like Patrice Petro's 'Kracauer's epistemological shift', alluding to Bordwell's theoretical gloss of Eisenstein but chiding Andrew and others for ignoring the

historical context in which Kracauer's legendary isolationism occurred. Like Elsaesser last year, who pointed out film theory's historical nexus in the institution of cinema rather than its scientistic outsideness, Petro underlined the importance of Kracauer's exiled status (a theme taken up elsewhere in the conference by concepts of Otherness and cultural syncretism) a position she noted in opposition to Bordwell's reduction of Stalinism to a passing phase in Eisenstein's development

The intellectual project of contextualizing, not historicizing, film theory continues, embedded here in a panel devoted to 'Gossip, biography and the everyday', itself an extension of our notions of the popular Like last year's feminist theory panel which re-considered the importance of biography in our structuralist and poststructuralist renunciation of authors, 'gossip and biography', as explored by Pat Mellancamp and Meaghan Morris, were 'those things we want to know about' in our everyday life Noting that gossip was associated with bad women and biography with good men, Mellancamp launched into a history of gossip, tabloids and the law of defamation that articulated a web of cultural determinants in which our fascination for what Nora Ephron once called 'potato chips for the mind' thrives Morris took this same experiential 'I want to know about' interest in why Warren Beatty and Madonna have split up into a critique of the nineteenth-century biography, challenging its closed, coherent, classical novel quality while unearthing the life of Ernestine Hill, Australian adventuress and subject of gossip, who saw the future of her writing adapted for film and television but who continued to write unattended and unrealized Morris's ambition to pursue Hill, buried adventuress, through a critique of nineteenth-century notions of biography reverberated well with Alison McKee's reading of the sources of *All This and Heaven Too*, which re-asserted a

female voice in which women's history powerfully intersected with the so-called public male history of the Wars of the Roses, not only refusing the margins of women's discourse but surpassing the king of France as a motivating historical subject

Jane Feuer's claim of eighties teen pics as musicals without families, self-reflexive, using synchronized musical sound but post-modernist in their reassemblage of parts of the musical in pastiche further demonstrated that impulse to take the popular seriously, to preserve the tension between analysis and experience, that makes film study as cultural study vital 'The Other Species Animals and Film' panel was an excellent instance of this, although it aroused controversy as to whether it had exceeded the boundaries of the seriously popular Kay Armatage's analysis of a 1921 film of the interface of human and animal, like Jane Gaines's semiotic analysis of Jane Powell's canine but clearly male dancing partner years ago for *Jump Cut*, was disarming preparation for Marsha Kinder's thesis outlining the blockbuster appeal of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* Kinder argued that identification with non-humans is a form of masquerade in the sense that Mary Ann Doan uses it, a distancing device, a mask worn and removed If *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* temporarily blurs the boundaries of human and gender in an appealing manner for its nintendo-conditioned audience, it eventually holds male identificatory dominance almost intact Kinder's wide-ranging paper proved one of the most ambitious, and opened us up for the yet more daring thesis of Anne Friedberg that Freud himself found in his dog a point of transitional identification, comparable with that of women or servants, who functioned as sympathetic companions and ideal students (his daughter after his alienation from Jung) This seriously challenged the exclusiveness of the construction of a human subject as object of desire, and led comfortably or un-comfortably to an examination of current

American advertising. Entertaining in tone but theoretically serious, Friedberg's direction proved as innovative as Guy Johnson and Chris Lippard's claim that the docklands location of recent British films – *The Last Of England, Caravaggio*, and *Little Dorritt* – challenged the ability of Thatcher's Britain to suppress the docks' historical presence in the gentrified housing of the new Britain As a studio set, the docklands subvert a certitude of how the historical subject is imprinted by history, not with a grieving or nostalgia for clippers and cruisers but with the implication that housing now papers over a non-existence

A final area of emergent scholarship, however suppressed by the contested title of SCS, is television, which recurred in panels on media, history and consumer culture (Mimi White), music (Claudia Gorbman), celebrity (Barry King), history and discourse Further, the interest in *cinéma verité* documentary evident in two panels may imply, however lacking in explicit connection, a parallel interest in a world Maggie Morse places discursively between the fiction film and television Christopher Anderson's description of the levels of power imbricated in General Electric's celebration of Edison's invention paralleled Mark Williams's focus on KTLA Los Angeles's featuring of A-bomb tests for national syndication Using Doane's categories of information, crisis, and catastrophe as modes of apprehending temporality in television, Williams illustrated television theory's discursive orientation, its unstable condition of direct address so different from the fixated hallucinatory gaze Mulvey popularized in film studies The issues television poses as an agent in history with a different representational status from film were addressed by Maggie Morse's Derrida/Austin-based performative theory of Rumania's Ceausescu losing power *on* television, not as represented *by* television The emergent energy of cultural critique in

these new strains should invigorate our next incarnation in Los Angeles, the preeminent city of American postmodernism.

Jeanne Thomas Allen

New Directions in Media Education, Toulouse, 2–6 July 1990

ONE of the attractions of media education is its continuing ability to confront new challenges and questions, just when it looks ready to settle into orthodoxy and complacency It has managed – however narrowly – to resist the pressures towards conservatism which hover threateningly, offering enticements of respectability, security of funding or institutional plaudits The description of this international conference on media education as a 'colloquy' (eccentrically translated from the less unusual 'colloque' in French) carried its own ambivalence, at least for English-speaking delegates. Was this a genuflection in the direction of the worst kind of academic pretentiousness, or an intentional signifier of difference, marking this conference off as preferring open and exploratory discussion to a pre-set agenda or thematic consistency?

'New Directions' or 'Nouvelles Orientations' (the conference was passively bilingual) was organized jointly by members of the education department of the British Film Institute and by CLEMI (Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Moyens d'Information), in association with UNESCO and the Council for Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe With such divergent origins, the initial emphasis on 'new directions' was difficult to sustain against the need to accommodate different interest groups If the negative effect of this was to produce an unfocused programme, with topics being added on without sufficient opportunity for synthesis or for analysis of emerging paradigm clashes, there were also

partial benefits in that no one group could easily establish their own blueprint. Audience reactions (and the participants were frequently, and sometimes restively, cast in this role) were correspondingly divergent, and often hotly contested, at least offstage With little sense emerging from plenary sessions of a collective map of key issues and concerns, it was left to informal groups and the often fragmentary but useful discussion sessions following the plenaries to generate their own agenda. As is so often the case with audience readings of media texts, the absence of a forum for doing something public and productive with our privately and informally-expressed reactions remained an underlying problem

In spite of these difficulties, a key strength of this conference lay in its composition The organizers had clearly made an effort to avoid some of the most common limitations of the international conference circuit – such as the privileging of wealthy over less wealthy nations, or of high-profile academics over less prestigious colleagues The colloquy cast its net widely and, apparently at least, democratically It succeeded in bringing together school teachers and academics, media professionals and educational policy-makers If problems of funding made it inevitable that the geographical emphasis would remain European, forty different countries were nevertheless represented, and the proportion of delegates from what we still persist in condescendingly labelling the 'developing' world was perhaps just sufficient to resist charges of tokenism This mix of participants confronted media education with some immediate challenges The conference itself may have been unable to pursue these adequately, but their longer-term significance remains, and in the rest of this report I will look briefly at some of them (leaving a more adequate documentary account of the week to the promised 'book of the conference')

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paper at the start of the proceedings. Media education, he suggested, could no longer justify the wearing of monocultural blinkers The increasingly transnational patterns of media ownership and the transcultural distribution of media texts make clear the redundancy and inadequacy of such an approach. If this produced a relaxed nodding of heads from his audience, the second strand of Kress's thesis provoked less comfortable and more fundamental questions about the limitations of current media educational practices. Citing the multicultural composition of the audiences we address, whether as educators or as media professionals, as an equally pressing argument for a new, more internationalist, direction in media education, he underscored the lethargy – or tokenism – with which many of us still respond to this reality. Kress's reminder is timely, if chastening. Financial and exchange-scheme incentives are currently conspiring, in British higher education at least, to identify Europe as a way of giving media courses, or research, 'an international dimension' (at the same time, but with less fanfare publicity, our academies exploit the revenue potential of the more affluent classes in the 'developing' world) Although any departure from British (English?) insularity is welcome, and an expanding Europe does, of course, offer newly rich opportunities to explore relations between the media and cultural identity, Eurocentrism nevertheless carries its own risks of replacing one form of cultural imperialism with another

The colloquy pinpointed, in a number of ways, how familiarity with our own ways of approaching media education can trick us into an unthinking orthodoxy Exposure to the divergent objectives, methodologies and conceptual repertoires which exist in other countries' versions of media education helped to raise to the surface questions which habit tends to suppress Why, for example (as our colleagues from the 'developing' countries

were often quick to ask), is media education in Britain centred on children, while adults (except for those in higher education) are relatively ignored? And why is 'appropriation' of media technologies and modes of signification regarded as a suitable objective in Latin American countries, where resources are severely limited and emergent democracies at best precarious, while in Britain we prefer the politically tamer aims of 'improving access' or 'encouraging critical analysis'? Our ability to provide ready explanations of current practices doesn't mean that we should rush to defend them Unsettling some of the customary axes around which media education rotates may be a necessary preliminary to seeking out new directions

Developing less ethnocentric approaches is undeniably worthy, but it can also feed self-interest by offering attractive possibilities for re-exploring familiar – but over-trodden – terrain A fascinating example of this was offered in a workshop on Indian media and media education. A mainly surprised audience (most of us were from the 'first world') heard that the *Mahabharat* continues to be re-enacted annually as popular folk entertainment and spectacle in many parts of India (so much for Peter Brook's revival of a long-lost epic!). Its transformation into the Brook *Mahabharata* – constructed by the British critical establishment as 'high art' – or into 'ethnic programming' via BBC scheduling of the Indian television version, offers novel – and richer – insights into relations between textual production, distribution and audiences than monoculturalism can provide It may not be too far-fetched, either, to speculate that some of the resistances we encounter from students when we attempt to teach historical approaches to culture and media could be lessened by better-informed crosscultural signposting. Diachronic accounts of popular culture or of narrative modes are undoubtedly more exciting and relevant if

they can contest a misperception of history as 'chronologically closed', by exploring synchronic continuities and transformations

For media education to develop a more fully-fledged internationalism or a more wholehearted multiculturalism, better opportunities for collaborative work and new directions in research are clearly needed One of the values of conferences such as this lies in stimulating fresh ideas for the form these might take The development of a wider range of crosscultural teaching materials is also urgent (and here, too, Toulouse opened up new possibilities). As always, funding needs to follow if imaginative proposals are to take material – and distributable – form.

Media education's tendency to be stringently self-reflexive about its own practices – whether in pedagogy, publication or (as in this instance) conferences – produced several ripples of disquiet throughout the week If our aims as media educators include contesting cultural imperialism, enabling suppressed voices to find means of articulation, and questioning vested interests in media production, then gaps between our theoretical goals and our own practices were sometimes alarmingly visible Delegates on the commission on the 'developing' countries were particularly – and rightly – indignant that the starting point offered to them for their deliberations was a definition of media education devised specifically for British primary education Their sense that the agenda for this commission was preset and relatively inflexible – however successfully they contested this – merely added to their

unease Women delegates – many of whom had experienced some form of sexism during the week (in some cases direct sexual harassment both on and off the campus) – felt the conference had done little to ensure issues of gender were incorporated on to the agenda In what was undoubtedly the sourest point of the week, some male delegates unashamedly booed as women applauded the plan to set up a women's network (proposed as one possible 'new direction'). The shocked sense of disbelief this generated among many colleagues (male, as well as female) was the only reassurance that we were still, indeed, in 1990 A final query about the relationship between theory and practice arose from the sporadic insights throughout the conference into the diverse range of organizations supporting and funding media education in different parts of the world. Many of these are undoubtedly benign – and even benevolent – but it seems crucial (if we are to remain as discriminating about our sponsors as we would like the media to be) that information about our sources of funding, and institutional loyalties, is openly declared and widely publicized

Structured spaces are, in the end, illsuited to the 'speaking together' or 'mutual discourse' which my dictionary defines as the meaning of 'colloquy', but the achievement of this conference was to widen the range of voices we need to attend to if media education is to continue to evolve Indeed, 'mutual discoursing' may not be such a bad description of the project we now need to pursue.

Myra Macdonald

reviews

review article:

RAVI VASUDEVAN

Indian commercial cinema

Beatrix Pfleiderer and Lothar Lutze, *The Hindi Film: Agent and Re-agent of Cultural Change*. Delhi: Manohar, 1985, 272 pp.

Framework, nos. 32–33, 1986. Article by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Neo-traditionalism: film as popular art in India', pp. 20–67.

Journal of Arts and Ideas, nos. 14–15, 1987. Articles by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke era: conflict of traditional form and modern technology', pp. 47–78; Geeta Kapur, 'Mythic material in Indian cinema', pp. 79–107.

Quarterly Review of Film and Video, vol. 11, no. 3, 1989. Special issue on Indian popular cinema, ed. Mira Reym Binford. Articles by Rosie Thomas, 'Sanctity and Scandal: the mythologization of *Mother India*', pp. 11–30; Sumita S. Chakravarty, 'National identity and the realist aesthetic: Indian cinema of the fifties', pp. 31–48; Vijay Mishra, Peter Jeffery and Brian Shoesmith, 'The actor as parallel text in Bombay cinema', pp. 49–67; Manjunath Pendakur, 'New cultural technologies and the fading glitter of Indian cinema', pp. 69–78.

IN film studies, attention towards non-western cinema has recently taken the form of a focus on avant-garde practices, a 'third cinema' This has arisen from third world filmmakers' and theoreticians' concern to recover or reinvent a distinct aesthetic-political tradition, uncontaminated by the dictates of what they perceive to be a commodity cinema, whether of imported or domestic origin Cultural politics on the left wing of the metropolis's ethnic minorities have contributed to this trend, and there are echoes in

1 Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds) *Questions of Third Cinema* (London British Film Institute 1989)

the larger politics of the left, as broader, cross-racial radical formations seek to create spaces for those marginalized by the dominant culture.[1]

Important as the third cinema has been in destabilizing existing ideas about the nature of cinema and western 'humanist' cultural norms, it has displaced attention from the commercial cinemas of the Third World, and from the substantial audiences these command. In the case of India, this has meant indifference to a particularly powerful form, even if one now in decline In fact third cinema theorists charge the critic who analyses the culture of the commercial cinema with using a 'populist approach to Indian cinema' When a western critic is involved, it is a question of the guilty metropolitan intellectual's misguided attempt to identify with the subordinated minority culture. More seriously, such work is believed to be in danger of diverting anti-racist currents, and perhaps even of legitimizing the 'translating [of] ghettoisation into marketing techniques by, for instance, wealthy Asians ' [2]

2 Ashish Rajadhyaksha Neo-traditionalism p 23

Such views derive from the popularity of commercial cinema in India, which makes it a prime target for the exponents of a marginally positioned countercultural radical practice However, as Rosie Thomas has pointed out, western discourses on Indian cinema are so dismissive that it becomes all the more imperative to show how these films work and the attractions they afford.[3] Furthermore, from the viewpoint of the British Indian populace, Hindi films do not segregate, nor do they ghettoize in any simple sense; they are rather used within families to contest meanings and identities.[4] Even in India, commercial cinema is subordinated within the hierarchy of taste fashioned by the middle-class intelligentsia And so when third cinema critics dismiss the commercial product, barring a few exceptional auteurs, their attitudes cannot be seriously distinguished from those of the system of high culture which assigns a lowly place to Indian popular film

3 Rosie Thomas Indian cinema pleasures and popularity *Screen* vol 26 nos 3–4 (1985) pp 116–31
4 Marie Gillespie Technology and tradition audio-visual culture among South Asian families in west London' *Cultural Studies* vol 3 no 2 (1989) pp 226–39

In this review article I shall look at recent scholarship[5] on the commercial Hindi film in terms of the following categories indigenous aesthetic modes and their transformation, iconographic features and their relation to the construction of stars and narrative modes, and finally, the question of audiences, new modes of exhibition, and the effect of new media technologies

5 Relevant earlier readings include Erik Barnouw and S Krishnaswamy *Indian Film* (New York Oxford University Press 1962, reprint 1980) still the best general history *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol 8, no 1 (1981)

Like avant garde oriented film studies in the West, writings in India have recently analysed the aesthetic features of early films Coincidentally, these early modes have been identified as an aesthetics of frontality, just as they have been in the West There, however, the similarity ceases Western theorists have investigated frontality both to understand its relationship with subsequent modes of classical narrative and also to point out the 'panoramic', less regulated, terms on which early spectatorship was founded [6] In

6 Noel Burch How we got into pictures notes accompanying *Correction Please Afterimage* nos 8–9 (1981) esp pp 25–8
7 Rajadhyaksha Neo-traditionalism and 'The Phalke era Kapur Mythic material in Indian cinema

Ashish Rajadhyaksha's and Geeta Kapur's[7] work, the frontal aesthetic is seen as characteristic of Indian painting and performative media, which fundamentally go against western laws of perspective in their lack of depth and stylistic emphasis on surface. The concern of these critics then is not so much with early cinema history as with establishing an altogether different aesthetic tradition. They regard frontality as integral to popular forms which were transformed as artisans adapted to new methods – for painters, for example, European naturalism – and to new technologies of mass reproduction, in printing, engraving, photography, and finally through the cinema.

8 Tapati Guha Thakurta, Artists artisans and mass picture production in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta the changing iconography of popular prints *South Asia Research* vol 8 no 1 (1988) pp 3–45
9 The Phalke era pp 69–71

Other analyses have defined such changes as a move from popular to mass art, and as a shift from a frontal to a three-dimensional style.[8] Put in the perspective of the emergence of such a mass-realist style, the emphasis on frontality suggests a somewhat romantic adherence to the notion of a modern popular form that never was However in the cinema, certainly, as Rajadhyaksha's important work on the film *Shri Krishna Janma* (D G. Phalke, 1918) indicates, elements of frontality persisted.[9] On the other hand, his analysis of a fragment of *Raja Harischandra* (D G Phalke, 1912) suggests other features operating quite outside this paradigm Instead of a simple frontality, attempts to extend space through continuity editing and to develop a narrative logic are observable.[10] It is this combination of features which renders inadequate any simple notion of the frontal as the dominant aesthetic of the popular.

10 This is my reading of Rajadhyaksha s notes in 'The Phalke era', pp 73–4

Unfortunately, as so little early Indian cinema still exists, it will be difficult to trace the formal shifts that took place On the other hand, however, frontality is a persistent feature of commercial cinema. In the mythological or devotional genre, the spectatorial look is often arranged frontally onto the devotee, icon, or the epic tableau, inducting us into its generic-sacral discourse. But the frontal is also used outside such generically motivated instances, and is observable also in the 'social' genre – the industry's term for films handling modern situations. There are two points here: the iconic/tableau features are now transposed onto functions other than the mythical or devotional, or the mythical and devotional functions are carried over and embedded in, or layered over by, new reference points.

I will briefly note, from my own work, that the frontal mode is employed to transfer certain instances in secular narratives into mythic discourse, especially in terms of gender relations and family conflicts. The expulsion of a wife by a husband who suspects her chastity in *Awara/Vagabond* (Raj Kapoor, 1951) is an example: this one refers to the myth of Ram and Sita. But it also occurs where relations dangle precariously in terms of cultural representation, in a kind of reverse mythic articulation: as when a married couple quarrel on the golf course in *Andaz/Style* (Mehboob Khan, 1949) And it is more generally used for romantic and performative

tableaux; for example in the presentation of dialogue between lovers or the routine of the comic. In these various instances, offscreen space is temporarily suspended as the narration fulfils its mythic and performative requirements.

Another issue arising out of the question of an indigenous aesthetics is the theory of *rasasutra*, which outlines different modes of pleasure within the drama, ranging from the emotional to the erotic and comic. Most accounts ritually invoke this theory (see, for example, Lothar Lutze, 'From Bharata to Bombay', in *The Hindi Film*), but there has been no serious attempt to show how it relates to the pleasures of the Hindi film. A notion of a different order of textual construction and pleasure would be useful as a means of handling the discontinuity and the redundant, even circular, moves observable within narratives and in the relation between narrative units and song and dance sequences A precondition for this would be an examination of relatively recent dramatic and performative media, in order to see how earlier traditions were transformed. Research in this area is now beginning.[11]

11 See for example, Kathryn Hansen The birth of Hindi drama in Banaras, 1868–1885 in Sandria Freitag (ed) *Culture and Power in Banaras Community Performance and Environment 1800–1980* (Delhi Oxford University Press 1989) pp 62–92

Vijay Mishra and Jeffrey Shaesmith use the idea of 'actor as parallel text' (Mishra *et al.* in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* special issue) to suggest that certain actors – such as Amitabh Bachchan, Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar – achieved a status beyond stardom through their articulation with mythical figures Apart from conventional mythic resonances – the just king Ram and the romantic figure of Krishna for men, Sita and Savitri as models of constancy and devotion for women – the authors remind us of more transgressive figures, such as Karna and Ahalya, whom they believe should be drawn on to complicate the iconography of Hindi film characters

It is argued that the use of songs and dialogue is central to the parallel text in an oral culture, though it is not clear how such an articulation is generated in these ways Mukesh Kumar sang for Raj Kapoor in many films, and the continuity in the star's aural image appears to be important to the analysis, however, a longterm tying of singing voice to actor is not shown for Dilip Kumar Continuity of emotional articulation through lyrics is also not self-evident And, as far as screen personality is concerned, amongst the films defining Dilip Kumar as 'parallel text', his incarnation in *Ganga Jamuna* (Nitin Bose, 1961) as earthy peasant engaged in robust dialogue and songs rests uneasily with the more sophisticated characters of his other roles

Finally, a method to demonstrate the interesting distinction between actor as parallel text and star does not appear to have emerged Further, while the linking of Bachchan with a mythic type such as Karna, the tragic illegitimate figure of the *Mahabharata*, is suggestive, it may be precious to go into less well-known characters such as Ahalya It would be as well to examine which mythic figures

or situations are circulated within the wider media culture – through mythological comics, songs, perhaps even folk theatre – so that we might gain some idea of the range of images a film audience is familiar with

In her fine article on *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) in the *QRFV* special issue, Rosie Thomas draws on mythic iconography and the conditions of circulation of film and star texts to assess Indian reception of the film. Starting from the Hindi cinema's proclivity to generate self-orientalizing images, she uses a method of discursive inversion to suggest how *Mother India* may be read in anti-colonial ways Katherine Mayo's 1927 racist book of the same name – perhaps simultaneously a displaced miscegenation fantasy? – painted a picture of the brutal sex inflicted on Indian women, and used this to argue that as a result Indian genetic stock was depleted and Indians unfit to rule The film, in contrast, shows how the heroine successfully defends herself against a rapacious moneylender a displacement, in Thomas's view, of the colonial experience

Thomas problematizes this reading by noting that female chastity in *Mother India* is fraught with contradictory and sometimes excessive imagery The heroine is constructed not only through conventional images of the faithful and sacrificing female; she also embodies the awesome, destructive woman Her chastity is a powerful, even a dangerous, force – most of the men associated with her are killed or neutralized, but, if properly controlled, it can be harnessed for the benefit of the patriarchal order Thomas shows how the film's publicity campaign elided such images in favour of the less threatening one, but argues that, given that there is a slip between the woman and the nation in the narration (it is the nation which is vulnerable to colonial assault and must preserve its purity/identity) such a move can be considered simultaneously oppressive and legitimate, presumably depending on the context and the audience addressed She concludes by showing the intriguing parallels that relate stories about Nargis, the film's star, to the *Mother India* story, all of which emphasize the power of a controlled female sexuality These had abiding political implications, she argues, and were reflected in the *Mother India* imagery used by her husband Sunil Dutt later in his political career.

Thomas's article offers a subtle and complex cultural analysis of the shifting meanings a domestic audience might receive from one film But a difficulty is her use of discursive inversion to mobilize a nationalist, anti-colonial reading A more contextual analysis suggests to me that, in part at least, the film and its publicity campaign constituted a knowing rendering of India for the West. As Thomas herself notes, the booklet accompanying the film (in English. rather than bilingual as was more conventional for domestic consumption) was intended for foreign audiences Like Mehboob's

12 *Aan* had been released by Alexander Korda's London Films Mehboob a biography a note for Columbia Pictures Corporation British Film Institute

13 'The gods help those *Filmfare* vol 3 no 1 (1954) pp 10–11, 13

14 A *Filmfare* editorial urged the possibilities open to the Indian film in the world market That world wishes to see and to know India the real India and its people in their native haunt and setting in their actual way of life' *Filmfare*, vol 2 no 15 (1953), p 3

15 For a typical critique of commercial cinema from this position, see Kobita Sarkar Influences on the Indian film *Indian Film Quarterly*, vol 1 no 1 (1957) pp 9–14

Aan/Pride (1951) before it, *Mother India* was released abroad, this time by a major US company, Columbia [12] More generally, this was a period in which there were serous debates about strategies for making Indian films marketable in the West either in terms of neutralizing peculiarities – such as the song and dance sequences[13] – or by emphasizing exotic civilizational differences [14] The publicity campaign for *Mother India* was of the latter type. It is significant too that the film's allusion to colonialism is quite a repressed one It signals the political shift to independence without specifying that the past was a colonial one – except in a displaced way, as in Thomas's reading, and it could be argued that such an elision was calculated to make the film more palatable to western audiences So another set of possible meanings – of a fetishistic, market-oriented variety – may be added to the ones drawn out by Thomas

Sumita Chakravarty's article, in the *QRFV* special issue, on realism and nationalism in 1950s films makes four main points· realism was a middle-class attempt to represent and cohere an idea of the nation based on a belief that the 'real' people were to be found in villages and factories; this project was ideologically aligned to the new state's ambition to develop a scientific outlook and do away with economic backwardness; such a materially oriented goal was antithetical to Indian 'folk imagination', the movies drew upon the traditional iconography of renunciation to make the realist-nationalist objective ideologically more palatable to the indigenous culture

Chakravarty never satisfactorily defines realism, but she does alert us to a definite issue here Even if the discourses surrounding fifties commercial realism are not as yet clear, the subject matter, social types, and a mise-en-scene of the squalid, all indicate that some kind of realist project was under way, albeit one very different from that of the regional art cinema emerging in Bengal at the time.[15] And yet the product that Chakravarty has identified – a social-reform minded, all-India rather than regional, cinema – can itself be internally differentiated Bimal Roy's films, for example, based on novels or structured screenplays, often aimed – within a commercial-popular framework – at an audience with a literary background As a result, we are often presented with a more identifiably naturalist, and less mannered and performative, acting style in his films In contrast, other 'socials' with elements of a realist mise-en-scene – the work of Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt in particular – used a sensationalist, starkly oppositional narrative form and style (expressionist lighting codes often being in evidence) that take us firmly back to the melodramatic orientations of the commercial cinema

These films also catered to the middle class. but within a shifting address. one inviting the spectator into the social flux It is in this way that the term *nation* might be more precisely employed in

relation to the cinema and its functions: as an expanded space, on screen and in the audience, a fantasy space of instability and restoration organised around a middle-class norm. The protagonist is uprooted from this norm and made mobile, not so much between poles defined in class terms, but between stark, melodramatically defined moral oppositions in which criminality and corruption are ranged against innocence, purity and sensitivity.

Rather than introducing new social types, the realist strategy largely destabilised the middle-class figure. It was through such a protagonist that certain evils were exposed inability to get an education, a job, a decent home, social respect. It was as if the middle class was being asked imaginatively to identify itself with a situation of deprivation Implicitly, such films put up an agenda for social change This was in line with that aspect of the new state's ideology which focused on social justice rather than material transformation In that sense the renouncer did not have to be called upon symbolically to withdraw from material drives associated with the state's ideology Rather, when he was called upon (as in *Shri 420/Mr 420* [Raj Kapoor, 1956] or *Pyaasa/The Thirsty One* [Guru Dutt, 1957]), he could be said to function like the transcendent Brahmin of Hindu tradition, who stood outside society and pointed to an ideal morality, thus setting the King a normative agenda for his rule [16] The renouncer figure of the Hindi melodrama effected a similar stance to the new state

16 J C Heesterman *The Inner Conflict of Tradition Essays in Indian Ritual Kingship and Society* (Chicago and London Chicago University Press, 1985) For an excellent analysis of the renouncer in relation to dissent and incorporation, see Romila Thapar 'Renunciation the making of a counter-culture?' in Romila Thapar (ed) *Ancient Indian Social History* (Delhi Sangam Books, 1978)

Audience research on Indian commercial cinema has been nominal Pfleiderer and Lutze's research in this area (published in *The Hindi Film*), for example, sidelines the question of cinematic spectatorship although their list of questions refers to the reasons why people see films and to 'which parts of life are affected by film messages' (p. 86), these points do not appear to have been pressed in discussion with with participants Instead, emphasis is placed on the ways in which response to film themes provides insight into the social construction of reality Questions revolve around the sanitized middle-class familial features of films Sometimes this is reasonable, as when the film is a 'family social'; but to confine discussion of a violent crime film like *Deewar/The Wall* (Yash Chopra, 1974) to these terms seems bizarre Of course, the interviewers have chosen the family as the basic group for discussion, and this might have proved restrictive

Pfleiderer and Lutze note that the cinema remains largely an urban phenomenon The research done by Manjunath Pendakur, published in *QRFV*, on the new media of television and video suggests that here too the phenomenon is at present confined to the middle class However, while in India ownership of VCRs and TV sets is restricted, their usage in video parlours appears to have been more broadly based Pendakur's survey in Karnataka, South India,

shows that video parlours tended to function as ancillary to the film industry, supplementing meagre cinema outlets It seems likely, however, that video must have proved more competitive to the film industry than Pendakur suggests But his point is taken that an ailing, disunited industry seems to have worsened the situation by trying to make it illegal and financially difficult for videocassette outlets to function. Amendment of copyright laws and enforcement of an expensive 'recensorship' of Indian films on videocassettes have pushed up the rate of piracy, where selling of rights might have brought the problem under control.

The spread of television – enabled by the communication drives of the state in the 1980s, liberalization of import policies on TV technology, and investment by industrial corporations in advertising and sponsorship[17] – is anticipated to result in some thirty million sets and 120 million viewers in the early part of the present decade. The commercial film industry, floundering in the wake of continued exploitative entertainment tax (33% to 50% in some states), tax on raw stock, high rates of interest, and its own disorganization and failure to renew and diversify itself, has been in a crisis situation for some time. As Pendakur remarks, Indian commercial cinema must differentiate its product, invest in TV films, and make peace with video interests, if it is to survive as a viable economic institution

17 Manjunath Pendakur Indian television comes of age liberalization and the rise of consumer culture *Communication* vol 11 (1989) pp 177–97

review article:

GINETTE VINCENDEAU

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990, 340 pp.

SANDY Flitterman-Lewis's project in this book is doubly ambitious and innovative On the one hand, this is a work of feminist film theory which ventures into the largely unexplored terrain (from a feminist perspective, that is) of non-Hollywood cinema, seeking to apply and test some of the major tenets of contemporary film theory – questions of the gaze and cinematic point of view, and theories of enunciation – to a cinema that is culturally and formally different from the material on which these theories were, on the whole, based. On the other hand, through the study of three filmmakers – Germaine Dulac, Marie Epstein, and Agnès Varda – that forms the bulk of the book, Flitterman-Lewis aims to bring new insight, from a feminist perspective, into French cinema, primarily into the work of the filmmakers, but also into their historical and stylistic contexts – respectively, the French avant garde of the 1920s, the Poetic Realism of the 1930s, and the New Wave of the 1960s Although, in my opinion, the first of these strands is better realized than the second, *To Desire Differently* is undoubtedly a major intervention in its field If, occasionally, the dual tracks of feminist film theory and French film history diverge or overlap in awkward ways, they also provide the book with its vitality and originality

Flitterman-Lewis's credentials as a feminist film theoretician have been solidly established over the last fifteen years, through her writings in such publications as *Screen*, *Wide Angle*, and also *Camera Obscura*, which she helped found in 1974 Her very substantial introduction to *To Desire Differently* is a thorough account of state-of-the-art feminist film theory, both in terms of

feminist analyses of classical (Hollywood) cinema – especially its gendered scopic economy, and its structuring of identification and spectatorial pleasure – and of the formulation of what a feminist (counter)cinema might be, stressing the need to understand the former in order to generate the latter. Within these parameters, the crucial question for feminist film theory specifically addressed by this book is this as filmmakers, characters, and spectators, can women appropriate the gaze? Can a 'woman's desire' and 'woman's discourse' be inscribed in the cinema? In feminist writings on cinema, from Laura Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' to Mary Ann Doane's work on the woman's film of the 1940s, the answer has tended to be negative. Being careful to avoid the 'pitfalls of a traditional feminist criticism which seeks to discover a preexisting "feminine sensibility"' (p 3), and 'the impasses of biology and of content analysis' (p 20), Flitterman-Lewis posits the possibility of a less pessimistic scenario, exploring instances of a woman's cinema which resists dominant (masculine) cinematic models, and in which women can 'desire differently'

Underlying this enquiry is, unavoidably, the question of female (and feminist) authorship, and its inherent paradox from the standpoint of contemporary theories of authorship in cinema Is it possible to posit a feminist cinema *not* based on 'the biological gender of the filmmaker' (p 22), while concentrating on the work of three female filmmakers? Flitterman-Lewis's strategy is to reposition authorship within 'specific textual and enunciative processes' (p 22), as well as particular historical 'moments'. As mentioned above, the first aspect of this twin project seems to me the most satisfactory, partly because of Flitterman-Lewis's brilliant mastery of her analytical tools Her readings of Dulac's *La Souriante Mme Beudet* (1923) and *La Coquille et le clergyman* (1927), of Epstein's *La Maternelle* (1933), and of Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) and *Sans toit ni loi* (1985) are textual analysis at its best meticulous, elegant, and illuminating They certainly fulfil her stated aim to 'locate, through detailed analyses of specific texts, the theoretical issues surrounding the representation of women and the cinematic apparatus' (p 26)

The choice of primary material in *To Desire Differently* is a mixture of classic (Dulac and Varda) and adventurous (Epstein) Dulac and Varda are important figures in the feminist film canon Across the decades, these directors echo each other in their stated feminism, in their concern for filmic specificity ('pure cinema' or *cinécriture*). and in their singularity as women within two otherwise male movements, the 1920s avant garde and the New Wave As classic instances of European art cinema auteurs, they are excellent examples of Flitterman-Lewis's notion of a 'double rupture'. 'within the context of resistance to Hollywood represented by virtually all of the major French directors of these periods, the women filmmakers differed (yet again) from their male counterparts' (p 25) Yet,

whereas this notion of a double break from the mainstream is seductive, it also runs the danger of being, ultimately, Americano-centric and marginalizing. Obviously, French filmmakers have had to work with and against Hollywood 'classical' norms, but their history needs to be written also against the background of culturally specific roots and traditions. In this respect, Flitterman-Lewis tends to focus on the avant garde and on auteur cinema, aligning French indigenous popular (narrative) traditions with Hollywood, as the common 'enemy'. This is particularly evident in the chapter devoted to Marie Epstein, which is otherwise the most interesting and original.

Flitterman-Lewis's decision to devote a chapter to Marie Epstein's work is more than welcome. Epstein is truly one of the 'invisible women' of film history, owing to the common gender bias of that discipline, and, it has to be said, her own incredible modesty. As Flitterman-Lewis says, in interviews she shows a 'constant deflection of attention away from herself to other filmmakers [   ] in direct contradiction to the inspiration of her galvanizing energy and her considerable achievements'. (p 142) She was a major influence on her brother Jean Epstein (one of the prominent figures of the 1920s avant garde), was virtually the only woman director in France in the 1930s, and was later, for a long time, a key figure at the Cinémathèque Française. Yet, when not totally ignored, she is described as an appendage to her brother, and, later, to her close friend Jean Benoit-Lévy; with them, she in turn acted, scripted, directed and edited. Here Flitterman-Lewis's book performs the vital function of feminist archaeology, and I suspect that many of her readers will discover Epstein's work – or indeed existence – thanks to her.

Flitterman-Lewis's reading of *La Maternelle*, Epstein's (and Benoit-Lévy's) most critically acclaimed and commercially successful film, is excellent, and forcefully brings out her contention that 'in [Epstein's] films, the formative matrixes of fantasy and maternal desire are recast according to a logic which is undeniably female' (p. 318). My own regrets are that she did not extend her close textual analyses to all of Epstein's films (though clearly availability was a problem), and that more weight could not be given to the cultural and cinematic context of Epstein's work. For instance, Flitterman-Lewis is right to emphasize the primacy given to the mother-child bond, but the figuring of this dyad would acquire even more significance in relation to the complex (and contradictory) contemporary discourses around motherhood, as well as to the melodramatic structures and star system of French popular cinema in the 1930s within which Epstein *did* work.

Apart from her pioneering work on Marie Epstein, Flitterman-Lewis explores the work of Germaine Dulac in great depth, and in particular Dulac's preoccupation with representing feminine

subjectivity and desire, to establish 'what constitutes an alternative language of desire "in the feminine"' (p 99), and she sets the record straight on Dulac's famous collaboration with Antonin Artaud, the author of the script of *La Coquille et le clergyman* Varda's concept of *cinécriture* is also productively examined, along with her 'critical explorations of both the production of femininity and its representations' (p. 215), particularly through *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Sans toit ni loi*. Flitterman-Lewis's reclaiming of Varda's significance for, as well as her difference from, the New Wave, is most welcome, for although Varda has been routinely described as 'precursor' and even 'mother' of the New Wave, these adjectives have been used for the purpose of marginalizing rather than integrating her in this 'movement'

Beyond being an excellent resource on Dulac, Epstein, and Varda, *To Desire Differently* will be relevant to those concerned with a feminist aesthetics and women's cinema Flitterman-Lewis is committed to the notion that a feminist cinema is one of resistance and that 'the very notion of a feminist appropriation of the cinematic gaze will imply new forms of representation, new narrative structures, and new terms of address' (p 32) If her use of Dulac, Epstein, and Varda is sometimes in danger of bending their work to fit her theoretical model, that model does allow her to offer a complex notion of feminist authorship, a form of authorship that restores 'the marks of cinematic enunciation so carefully elided by the concealing operations of patriarchal cinema', that 'foregrounds sexual difference in the enunciative relay', and reinserts the sexed subject into the 'process of meaning-production'. (pp 22–3) Whether this definition means, as Flitterman-Lewis claims, that 'easy assumptions [.] such as intentionality, experience, and essential difference' (p. 318) can be left aside is not, to my mind, an easily settled matter But then this is a most problematic issue for feminist film theory, and Flitterman-Lewis's book is a most significant contribution to that debate

review article:

ANDY MEDHURST

**Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, 442 pp.
Claudia Clausius, *The Gentleman Is A Tramp*: Charlie Chaplin's Comedy. New York: Peter Lang, 1989, 194 pp.**

WHO cares about Chaplin? A ridiculous question, since in many ways he has personified cinema in the popular imagination for the best part of a century And yet it's also an important question for film studies, since Chaplin's films have attracted precious little serious criticism in recent years. This was not always the case there are in excess of two thousand books and articles written about the man and his work, but the bulk of them appeared some decades ago Film studies, as the field has come to be constituted since the late 1960s, has rarely found Chaplin worthy of attention

This can be accounted for partly by film theory's continuing neglect of comedy,[1] and partly by the fact that the current boom in the study of early cinema has been concerned primarily with questions (often rather microscopic questions) of film form Also, the existing body of Chaplin criticism can be seen as embodying precisely the kind of gushing, impressionistic humanism that modern film studies has been determined to transcend Titles like *The Little Tramp* and *The Great God Pan*[2] promise – and deliver – little in the way of coherent, incisive scholarship, preferring to collude in the construction of Chaplin-as-genius, ushering his tramp character into global mythology as a cinematic version of Everyman If you didn't like Chaplin, you kept quiet he had somehow been propelled beyond criticism, was taboo, sacrosanct, impossible to dislike The only comprehensive assault on the Chaplin mystique that I know of is David Thomson's succinct and invigoratingly savage attack in his

1 This I realize is a rather sweeping generalization See for example Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London Routledge 1990)

2 These were two influentially fulsome studies of Chaplin published in the 1950s Peter Cotes and Thelma Niklaus *The Little Tramp* (New York Philosophical Library 1951) Robert Payne *The Great God Pan* (New York Hermitage 1952)

Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema, to which I would advise any reader who remains immune to the bullying, saccharine megalomania of Chaplin's films to turn. Resisting the charms of these films, however, should not bar recognition of their historical and cultural importance Chaplin's centrality demands that he should receive the constructive, illuminating analysis that has been missing for so long

In 1989, the centenary of Chaplin's birth gave rise to an international multi-media circus in which the publishing industry played a substantial role, and Charles J. Maland's *Chaplin and American Culture* and Claudia Clausius's *The Gentleman Is A Tramp* emerged as part of that jamboree Do they manage to find a way out of the polluted morass that writing on Chaplin has become? Yes and no

Maland's book impresses through its sheer diligence As a means of avoiding the unconstructively celebratory tone which bedevils writing in this field, he has chosen to focus on Chaplin's star image. His methodology derives from Richard Dyer's pioneering work on stars, and the book is a long case study of the phenomenon of stardom, of Chaplin as paradigmatic star This, of course, is precisely what he was· arguably, nobody before Chaplin achieved such enormous fame through the medium of motion pictures He made the mould.

The book unearths fascinating material relating to the early period of what one contemporary writer termed 'Chaplinitis' Chaplin's success was not confined to being good box-office; he also inspired a whole range of spinoffs and subsidiary industries (this being one index of what marks out a true star from a merely popular performer) As early as 1915, there were Chaplin costumes offered for sale, while Chaplin lookalike contests took place across the United States, and the Chaplin moustache became a male fashion craze His life story was recycled in fan magazines, its fit with the key rags-to-riches mythology of American culture too good to ignore In an additionally fruitful twist, there was also the irony of his wealth as contrasted with the iconic characterizations of extreme poverty that had made him his fortune

The tramp figure became, and has remained, one of the indelible images of cinema, and Chaplin capitalized on its recognizability right from the beginning He knew that the first glimpse of a star was a film's crucial moment, and played around with this to the extent that in *The Immigrant* (1917) the audience's first view of the tramp is of his backside as he leans over the side of a ship· Chaplin was so famous he could be recognized by his behind

Where Chaplin differed from other stars, though, was that he worked behind the camera as well as in front of it, and the dual role of star and director was heavily milked in publicity This opened a new dimension to his stardom, since along with popular adulation

came the approval of the intelligentsia, and Chaplin's films became central in debates over the cultural legitimacy of cinema Here perhaps is where the notion of Chaplin as a paradigm of traditional stardom begins to look inadequate. Stars are not usually acclaimed as 'serious film artists', but Chaplin was.

Chaplin's career trajectory provides a rich and complex interweaving of stardom and authorship; though it is wrong, as Maland does, to talk of him as an 'auteur'. The *politique des auteurs*, in its classical form of the 1950s and 1960s, was centrally concerned with arguing for the presence of individual creativity where none had been perceived before – namely in the heart of the machine, in the belly of the beast, in Hollywood. Chaplin, on the contrary, had long been accorded the status of independent artist – for the simple and crucial reason that he enjoyed virtually unparalleled creative control over his own productions. Which other director would have been allowed to release 'silent' films in the 1930s? Chaplin's identity as auteur, then, belongs to an earlier period in debates over authorship Yet he also maintained and cultivated the persona of a star, and it is this unique blend of two usually mutually exclusive discourses which makes Chaplin fascinating, and could possibly retrieve him as an object of study from all those years of idolatrous treacle

The usefulness of *Chaplin and American Culture* resides in the amount of contextual material it provides. Ranging from fan magazines of 1914 to FBI documents relating to the notorious Cold War smear campaign against Chaplin, Maland offers an enormously impressive framework within which to situate the career The major absence, however, is any sustained engagement with the films themselves While he offers detailed descriptions of plots, he never risks deeper analysis The key question he consequently fails to answer is what it actually was in those early films that secured for Chaplin such massive public devotion

What Maland's work lacks might be termed 'an investigation of the spectator's role, unconscious and conscious, in the comic experience' – which is how Claudia Clausius, in her Preface, outlines the project of *The Gentleman is A Tramp* Sadly. this book lacks this dimension even more than does Maland's, being little more than a throwback to the bad old days of Charlie-worship As depressingly early as the first page. the tramp character is referred to as 'the Little Fellow' (oh. the archness of those initial capitals), and we are presented with the assertion that 'his language is universal and his comedy timeless' – precisely the kind of sprawling, fawning generalization that Maland's exhaustive trawl through the archives renders redundant

If Chaplin's comedy was 'timeless', why did certain sectors of the American audience campaign to ban his films during the Cold War? Where was the supposed universal love of the Little Fellow when in

1954 the *Saturday Evening Post* could sneer, as he received an award from Moscow· 'After living in the United States forty years, Chaplin has openly joined our enemy, the Soviet slave masters' (quoted in *Chaplin and American Culture*, p 319)? Clausius clings with grim tenacity to the timeless-genius thesis. in the teeth of the blatant fact that Chaplin's image suffered probably the most widely-known and damaging reversal of any star's She also adheres to the hoary, simplistic and frankly rather embarrassing notion that comedy is a magic key into the childlike sides of ourselves. Adults are rational, children are instinctive – that kind of woolly romanticism. I hesitate to puncture further what is already a scandalously leaky theoretical model, but there is simply no space here for history By history I mean not just the changes through which the Chaplin persona went, but also the related changes in audience perceptions of Chaplin's films.

As part of her project to homogenize responses to Chaplin. Clausius wields the pronoun 'we' with more grandeur than anyone since Queen Victoria 'we' see Chaplin's films like this, or like that. But this 'we' remains untainted by interrogation Firstly, the contemporary 'we' is not equivalent to any 'we' from the past: Chaplin's films meant different things in 1916, in 1952, in 1970, and it is these historical shifts which Maland investigates with such striking results. Secondly, the contemporary 'we' cannot be posited as homogenous in the naive way that Clausius suggests To take an obvious example, how are audience responses to Chaplin differently gendered? The clammy Victorian sexual politics of his films would repay feminist scrutiny; but any such notions are banished in Clausius's garden of impressionistic delights

While Clausius mentions in passing such theorists as Eisenstein and Metz, on the whole her book does not encourage thought, because thought is for grownups, and has no place in the kiddie-world of Charlie-land. Chaplin's later films distress her, because 'the tramp has grown up, become conscious, aware, is thinking and judging – all elements which   are inimical to the comic spirit' (p 142) This statement irritates partly because it once again deploys the meaningless universalizing that characterizes this book, but more fundamentally because it consigns Chaplin's work to a diversion for the brainless, a holiday from thought This is exactly the kind of loose, lazy assumption that has relegated comedy to the sidelines of cultural analysis, and it needs to be exposed as the banality that it is